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ABSTRACT

This collection presents 90 papers or summaries of papers presented at a 2000 conference on self-study and institutional improvement for institutions of higher education. Papers are grouped into these chapters, with some sample topics in parentheses: (1) "State, Regional, and National Initiatives" (program descriptions); (2) "Validating Quality in eLearning" (distance education; online courses); (3) "Quality Improvement in Higher Education" (institutional improvement; quality control); (4) "Vision, Values, and Strategic Planning" (student engagement; educational planning); (5) "Faculty/Staff in a Changing Environment" (professional development); (6) "Programs for Special Learner Needs" (adult students; experiential learning); (7) "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Faculty/Staff/Student Participation" (accountability; student evaluation); (8) "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Tools of Assessment" (portfolios; technology); (9) "Assessment: Special Challenges/Case Studies" (outcomes assessment; planning);(10) "Program Review" (evaluation methods); (11) "General Education" (curriculum; general education); (12) "Coordinating the Self-Study" (processes; tools); (13) "Self-Study: Practical Advice" (techniques; planning); (14) "The Evaluation Processes: Special Challenges/New Opportunities" (institutional research; accreditation). Most papers contain references. (SLD)

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The Higher Learning Commission

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2002 Edition

A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement

2002

Prepared for the program of

The Higher Learning Commission

Engaging the Future: Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

at the 107th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association

March 23 – 26, 2002 • Hyatt Regency Chicago

THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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The papers included in this collection offer the viewpoints of their authors. The Commission highly recommends them for study and for the advice they contain, but none represent official Commission directions, rules, or policies.

Susan E. Van Kollenburg, Editor

The Higher Learning Commission
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Foreword

With an Annual Meeting as rich and varied as ours, how can we focus on the Commission's latest major project: rewriting its accrediting requirements and criteria? The answer to that question almost a year ago shaped the theme for this 107th Annual Meeting. In approving "Restructuring Expectations: Accreditation 2004," the Board of Trustees called for new criteria that would enable institutions to engage their envisioned futures. Clearly, the requirements and criteria must also allow the Commission to provide the external quality validation that accreditation has long represented. Moreover, the new criteria and requirements must reflect the Commission's sensitive understanding of the new competitive marketplace reshaping many colleges and universities.

It is one thing to listen to stakeholders as they respond to proposed criteria and requirements. It is quite another to witness their working out in their own institutional settings the very same issues: How do institutions create programs that help them engage the future? What roles do organizational mission and vision play in that engagement? What kinds of validation do institutions seek and what are they willing to do to prepare for it? The papers provided in this *Collection of Papers* give us many excellent answers. With few exceptions, the answers show the increasing sensitivity of all of our members to the new educational marketplaces open to them.

The institutional implementation of quality improvement principles provide a powerful set of answers for AQIP institutions. Other institutions describe the importance of collaborative endeavors and cooperative initiatives in their preparations for the future. What is clear from many of the papers is the awareness that successful engagement will depend heavily on the capacity of an organization to collect and interpret data on which to base decisions for maintaining and strengthening educational quality. Effective assessment of student academic achievement is a fundamental component of this capacity. It is gratifying that as we move into our second decade of focus on assessment, this volume contains the richest collection of papers on student learning that we have ever compiled and published.

This year I am particularly impressed with the wide range of institutional voices represented in these pages. Moreover, I also welcome the opportunity to learn from those who are responsible for state governing and coordinating bodies as well as from a small but growing group of corporations ready to help institutions find new ways to engage the future.

The Commission is very fortunate to have the opportunity through this Annual Meeting to provide the venue for so much significant sharing and learning. This *Collection of Papers* plays a significant role in helping the Commission achieve its goal to "share its learning about quality higher learning and facilitate the sharing of such learning by and among institutions and other stakeholders." (Strategic Priority Four, "Statements of Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Strategic Priorities," adopted June 22, 2000.)

Steven D. Crow
Executive Director

March 1, 2002

Preface

On behalf of the Commission, I am pleased to present the 2002 edition of the *Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement.* Now in its eighteenth year, the *Collection of Papers* has moved beyond a supplement to the Meeting presentations to be a remarkable resource throughout the year for all who are interested in issues of higher education quality. We are grateful to our speakers for their generous contributions to the work of the Commission through these papers as well as through their presentations at the Annual Meeting.

The theme of the 2002 Annual Meeting, "Engaging the Future: Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace," is woven throughout the *Collection,* with *integrity* and *academic quality* emerging as strong subthemes in many papers, regardless of the focus. For the thirteen years of the Commission's Assessment Initiative, the *Collection of Papers* has highlighted institutional efforts to assess student academic achievement. In this year's edition, discussions of assessment efforts are not limited to the chapters on assessment, but appear in more than thirty papers throughout the volume. In addition, this year's *Collection* includes papers from the some of the first institutions participating in the Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). For those involved in self-study, the *Collection of Papers* goes beyond the policies and procedures provided in the *Handbook of Accreditation,* to give practical advice based on actual experience. Several papers explore alternatives to traditional self-study.

Producing a book of this size in five weeks requires significant team effort. Special thanks are given to the following individuals who made the 2002 *Collection* possible: Viki Berberich, for her help in processing initial submissions and preparing files; Sybil Sosin, for her valuable editorial assistance; Gerald Van Kollenburg, for his extraordinary assistance with the layout, particularly the charts and graphics; Kathleen Herring, for the beautiful cover design; and Aaron Marsh of Honi Graphics, for always getting the book printed in time for the Meeting.

The Commission invites your comments about the *Collection of Papers* and welcomes your suggestions for future topics for the Annual Meeting program. I hope that you will consider participation as a speaker at a future Meeting. The strength of the Annual Meeting lies in the willingness of our institutions to share their experiences with others. I look forward to seeing you in at the Meeting.

Susan E. Van Kollenburg
Editor
Associate Director for Programs, Publications,
and Member Services

March 1, 2002

Ed. note: The name of the Commission was changed from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education to The Higher Learning Commission effective January 1, 2001. In their papers, authors may have referred to this organization as the North Central Association, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, or The Higher Learning Commission. Information about the name change is available on the Commission's web site: www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org.

Part 1
Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 1
State, Regional, and National Initiatives

The Higher Learning Commission

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Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
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Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
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Integrity of the Degree: Integration of General Education and the Major

John P. Nichols

The split between sciences and humanities that C. P. Snow popularized as the unbridged "two cultures" of the modern intellectual world may not be the most important chasm in higher education. Another split, and one that has much more influence on contemporary higher education, is that between general education and the major. Yet, if we take the students' point of view on their one and only undergraduate degree, that degree is put together out of precisely those two principal components, the major and general education. What would students experience if we, faculty and administrators, could get those two components effectively and systematically to work together on student growth and development? What would four-year collaboration between the major and general education achieve?

I want to propose two reasons why we should **care** about this and then **do** something about it. First and foremost, the students. The hypothesis very simply is that planned and systematic collaboration between general education and the major, rather than the occasional and serendipitous integration that individual students might achieve, will generate more student growth and development than any fragmented degree program.

Secondly, we ought to be concerned, especially right now in higher education, about the integrity or wholeness of the baccalaureate degree. Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), claims that the main difference between "earning a degree" and "getting credentialed" lies in what general education contributes to the baccalaureate experience: a broader scope to education and an emphasis on the very life of the mind. No matter which of these two your philosophy of undergraduate education ranks the higher, it is complementarity between general education and the major that prepares graduates for citizenship and for life, in addition to career preparation.

Judith Eaton also published a monograph in early 2000 entitled *Core Academic Values*. The purpose of this publication was to alert regional accreditors to the challenges that the various modes of distance learning, plus the host of new providers of higher education, presented to six fundamental and traditional values in American higher education. Four of these six values are involved in the topic of my presentation: collegiality, authority of the faculty, the degree, and general education. The other two, institutional autonomy and site-based education, are less directly involved.

I've already referred to two of these values and their intimate connection in citing Eaton's claim that general education is the main difference between a credential and a degree. The other two of my four are likewise closely connected, because the integrity or wholeness of the undergraduate degree requires not only that faculty hold authority over curriculum and outcomes, but also that they exercise that authority with some collegial sense of the whole. The *sine qua non* of the integrity of the baccalaureate degree is the sense of responsibility that the whole faculty of an institution assumes for the whole curriculum of that institution.

This is not utopian thinking. Consider the following. I've visited somewhat more than fifty different institutions either as a consultant on general education or as an evaluator for a federal or foundation grant dealing with general education. What I've found in literally most of these instances is that the list of goals for general education at an institution is just about identical with a description of the graduates they would like to see walk across the stage on commencement day. If you add a concentration, a study in depth–in short, a major!–to that list, you do have a complete description of the graduate. Thus, there is a very short, logical step from "teaching prospective graduates from this institution" to "having a share of responsibility for attaining the goals of our general education program." But life is not always lived logically. Most faculty fulfill their contractual duties to their institution out of a sense of responsibility to one discipline.

To be more explicit, what we're going to be talking about is a reworked notion of liberal education. So let's back up a bit and look at a few traces of the liberal education tradition before moving forward to a recommendation about twenty-first century liberal education. The liberally educated mind, Newman says, can make accurate judgments about a wide range of truth claims. Are they well founded? Is more claimed than the supporting evidence justifies? Are the modal qualifiers well selected—certainly, very probably, approximately, and the like? Such a mind can do two very important things: seize the strong point in a piece of discourse, and connect truth claims the ones to the others. What this does—amazingly enough—is put the expertise of many other people at the disposal of the liberally educated person!

Newman says this is accomplished in the university by specializing in one discipline but also by living among and engaging in intercourse (nineteenth century meaning!) with practitioners of all the disciplines. In our jargon, it's the major and general education, the development of specialized and generalized critical thinking skills. Peter Drucker (1994), by the way, describes his main desirable outcome of a twenty-first century baccalaureate degree as the ability to communicate across disciplinary boundaries and thus to be able to function on problem solving teams (which have to be interdisciplinary because real-world problems are such).

Having been privileged to serve as a Senior Fellow at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, I am currently winding up a national project for AAC&U that worked with regional and specialized accreditors, as they redid their standards and redesigned the process of accreditation, in the hope of influencing them in the direction of setting a high value on liberal education. I have been overjoyed to find that this is not a problem these days with specialized accreditors. As they have made the switch from inputs to outcomes in their standards, they have discovered that some of the very traditional outcomes from liberal education are essential to a twenty-first century professional. ABET, for example, was moved in part to change its standards by a letter from the Boeing Corporation that listed six or seven "attributes of an attractive engineer," and only one of them dealt with engineering solutions.

Likewise, the AACN (1998) booklet on "The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice" asserts the irreplaceable value of a liberal arts foundation for the BSN, because "clinical judgments have as much to do with values and ethics as they do with science and technology." When the more and more international AACSB, just this past fall, set about to rewrite their accreditation criteria to fit the whole world, they ended up with a set of six outcomes (since they couldn't talk about credits or courses or any of the normal "American things"). Only one of the six outcomes deals with business knowledge; the others are very similar to general education goal statements.

These and other specialized accreditors are "flat out" calling for effective collaboration between general education and professional programs. The list of the liberal arts outcomes they value will surprise no one: communication skills, critical thinking, knowledge of the contemporary world, cultural sensitivity, and ethical astuteness.

Regional accreditors tend to be a bit less "flat out"—their accreditation is less voluntary, and they have to consider accrediting a much wider variety of institutions. Yet the Western Association's (WASC) recent revisions of standards list baccalaureate **degree** outcomes (rather than separate outcomes from the major and from general education), and their guideline calls for forty-five hours of general education coherently integrated with all the rest of the degree.

Our own beloved Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association is still engaged in the revision process. The current handbook demands **centrality** for general education. The general education program is to be coherent, achieve breadth, and be required for all students because it derives from mission and makes the "educated person." Steve Crow has suggested that "educated person" means the ability, beyond competence in some field, to make sound critical judgments. And the Middle States Association defines their notion of the "educated person" as one who can make intelligent judgments both within and outside his or her field of specialization.

There is a single thread of evidence that has been developing here, and now I want to pull it out into the open. All the individuals and all the agencies referred to above are focusing our attention on a baccalaureate degree that is a **collaboration** between a specialization and general education! Such a degree is a **liberal education,** because it aims at preparing students for more than a career. It aims, in fact, at preparing students for work and also for citizenship and for life. Let's line up some of the explicit and the just marginally implicit assertions that I've made thus far:

- A baccalaureate degree involves more than a major.
- General education is the difference between a degree and mere credentialing.
- "Educated person" means more than competence in some field.
- General education bears much of the burden of producing the "educated person."
- Some liberal arts outcomes are essential for the twenty-first century professional.

The twenty-first century notion of liberal education is that of an undergraduate experience that is a deliberate collaboration between general education and a major or a professional program.

There is much more about this notion that emerged from the five meetings that took place between January 1999 and December 2001 of the twenty-some members of my AAC&U Project on Accreditation and Assessment. The handout for this talk lists (on page 5) the project participants from six regional accreditors, five specialized accreditors, and eight higher education associations. The three-page centerfold in this brochure presents the amazing degree of consensus that the members of the project reached on four out of five key aspects recommended for the contemporary undergraduate experience.

The publications staff at AAC&U did a great job with the layout of the centerfold. You cannot miss the intent behind the diagram. There are five components of the undergraduate degree that have to be thought through and planned; there is a logical order to these five; and once you finish implementing number five, you revisit and perhaps rework some of the earlier ones. (The project did not develop number four, "Pedagogy," for the reason there given.)

You have to study the content of the four main boxes in the centerfold–the consensus statements reached by the members–in order to appreciate what has been accomplished here. The statements on "mission" and "outcomes" are not all that original, but they nevertheless have some significance as consensus statements from this particular group of people. The statements on "curriculum" and "assessment" do lay claim to originality and, together with "mission" and "outcomes," show clearly how the guiding principle of the **collaboration** between general education and the major manifests itself in the details of the whole diagram. There is ample room to adapt the outcomes, to apply the principles for curriculum design, and to create different assessment exercises, to be sure, but the robust collaborative and integrative notion for twenty-first century liberal education rings loudly and clearly all through the layout.

A further AAC&U publication from the project will explain and expand on the components of this model, add examples and applications, and describe about a dozen samples of good practice in senior-level assessments that integrate general education and major outcomes in the same student activity. This booklet will be available in the summer of 2002. (Check <www.aacu.edu> in early summer.)

The optimism expressed with regard to specialized accreditors and their renewed appreciation of liberal arts via general education needs to be tempered by two strong cautions. The liberal arts have much more than merely instrumental value, so skills development is not the only purpose for which to include them. And insisting on a "foundation" in the liberal arts for some professional program does not mean those courses can be "anything/anywhere." No, the liberal arts dimension–skills, values, cultural sensitivities, etc.–needs to be integrated right into upper-level work in the professional courses. Professional faculty need to model this dimension and build it into the requirements of their capstone courses.

Regional accreditors need to rally 'round CHEA's May 1, 2001 manifesto on "The Value of the Degree." The one association that has completed its revisions, the Western (WASC), has done so with excellence. The Higher Learning Commission's traditional insistence on the centrality of general education and the role of institutional mission in accreditation standards would seem to predict an equally excellent outcome for us. Nonetheless, "separate but equal" won't work any better in higher education than it did in public elementary and high schools. It is connected-ness and collaboration between general education and the major that is the keynote of the emerging twenty-first century notion of liberal education.

I opened by saying we ought to **care** about this and then **do** something. Having heard not the whole argument but a good piece of it, why care and what is doable?

1. Why care?
   - This notion of liberal education is critically **needed,** both for the wholeness or integrity and the value of the baccalaureate degree and for preparing worthy practitioners in the professions.
   - In terms of student growth and development and preparation for work and for life, this is a **potent** concept of undergraduate education.
2. This notion of liberal education is feasible or **doable,** as shown by its articulation by both accreditors and faculty/administrators in the project, as well as by success in the search for models of how to implement it.

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Integrating and Assessing Success Skills: A Twenty-First Century Learning Outcomes Project

Larry Coon
Anne Polenchar

The Challenge: Can We Pull It Off?

Many institutions are redefining their curricula to meet the needs of employers and make students successful in their careers. Hocking College's experiences may serve as a model for others as they undertake this experience.

Hocking College is now engaged in a process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes for a set of success skills essential to performing effectively in the twenty-first century. As part of its ReVISIONing Learning Project, all programs are in a process of review and change that includes incorporation of the success skills into the curriculum.

Hocking College has defined a set of eight success skills necessary for all graduates. The success skills are communications, computation, learning and critical thinking, professionalism, human relations, science and the environment, community, and ethics. Each program area is creating a curriculum map to determine where specific success skills are already embedded in courses and experiences. Success skills not currently included will be integrated through the ReVISIONing process. Co-curricular activities are also being reviewed for integration of success skills and will be using a similar process for full implementation.

The Story: Once Upon a Time...

In winter of 1998 the Academic Affairs Council undertook a reading and discussion program to study the learning college, how to manage change, and methods of reengineering curriculum and instruction. As a result the Academic Affairs ReVISIONing Learning Project to reengineer curriculum and instruction began in the fall of 1998 in response to perceived external challenges (changing customer expectations and demands, increased competition, and demands for accountability) and internal challenges (enrollment shifts, retention rates, graduation rates, and few learning options). The desired outcomes of the Academic Affairs ReVISIONing Learning Project are distinctive and creative educational programs and instruction, not limited by traditions, that preserves our reputation of excellence and effectiveness.

Are We Crazy, or What?

As time for reaccreditation approached, President John Light suggested that we look at the special emphasis option recently made available by the NCA Commission of Institutions of Higher Education. He then asked the vice presidents to explore potential areas of special emphasis. The vice presidents generated an initial list, then discussed and refined it. Following discussion with Dr. Light, the proposed areas of special emphasis were shared with several groups within the organization and with all employees. These stakeholders were asked whether the proposed areas of special emphasis represented the areas of highest need within the organization and whether there were other areas of need that should be addressed. The input received was carefully considered, and the proposal for completing a special emphasis self-study was developed.

By the fall of 1999, Hocking College had two major projects in the works: ReVISIONing Learning and a special emphasis project. In winter 2000, the League for Innovation asked Hocking College leaders if they would be interested in participating in the League's 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project along with sixteen other community colleges nationwide.

The goal of the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project is to increase the capacity of community colleges to define and document the acquisition of the critical competencies (success skills) that students need to succeed in the workplace, in transfer education, and in today's society. The project's goals and objectives almost aligned with the ReVISIONing Learning project and the special emphasis self-study, and the decision was made to volunteer to be a leader and to participate in and complete this initiative.

A minor detail that needed to be addressed was how to get faculty and staff to buy into this last project on top of two years of already pushing the button on going the extra mile and doing more for less, and still maintaining a happy, positive, and enthusiastic attitude.

Your Time Spent with Us: What You Will Learn!

The Hocking team will address involvement in the League project and how it correlates with the other initiatives. An assessment of the impact that the project has had on the organization will be shared. Issues encountered by the team, barriers, and accomplishments along the way to progress will be examined.

The League identified eight essential skills for twenty-first century success. Sixteen two-year colleges were chosen to design and test innovative performance-based methods for defining, delivering, and documenting student learning.

Even before the League's project, however, Hocking College had developed its own set of eight core competencies, which were approved in 1989 and updated in 1999. At the suggestion of a student focus group in summer 2001, the team agreed to change the name of our core competencies to "success skills." After becoming involved in the project, the Hocking team discovered that its eight success skills were similar to the League's, which include communication skills, computation skills, community skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, information management skills, interpersonal skills, personal skills, and technology skills.

As part of the ReVISIONing project, all Hocking College programs are in a process of review and change that includes incorporation of the success skills into the curriculum. Each program area is creating a curriculum map to determine where specific core competencies are already embedded in courses and experiences. Success skills not currently included will be integrated through the ReVISIONing process. Co-curricular activities are also being reviewed for core competency integration and will be using a similar process for full implementation

The competency "communicates effectively" has been selected as the focus for Project Year One. It was chosen for its importance, its partial integration across the curriculum, and the current practices in place to assess it. It is serving as a model for developing, delivering, and documenting the other core competencies. Levels of student performance have been identified, and concrete indicators are defined for "communicates effectively," and an assessment plan has been developed that includes such tools as portfolios and capstone courses. Campus-wide rubrics for oral presentations, essays, and other written work have been constructed.

Six technical programs were selected to pilot the initial implementation of the success skill. The experiences of the pilot programs will be considered when developing models to assist future implementation efforts. Students were informed about the value of the success skills during orientation and the ways in which the success skills are going to be taught, assessed, and documented. Facilitators of learning are employing such methods as problem-based learning, service learning, and interdisciplinary cohorts to help students achieve high-level skills in the core competencies. Student achievement is being documented after the research and selection of an alternative method such as paper portfolio, electronic portfolio, enhanced transcript, or smart card.

Presenters' Involvement: Yes, There Is Life After Work—Maybe?

Both presenters are the designated leaders in their departments and were responsible for coordinating the activities with the faculty and programs to implement the process.

Becoming Involved in the Session: Give Us Your Two Bits

Participants will be provided a feedback form to allow them to engage with us in the process of evaluating our own work. We will ask them up front to think critically throughout the presentation and provide their wisdom to the project.

Beginning with the End in Mind: We Really Want to Help!

At the end of this presentation, the participants will be able to state how one college has integrated the success skill "communicates effectively" into the curriculum. The participants will also learn how this skill is being assessed and documented in courses. The Hocking team's expectation is to learn from the participants through their impressions, ideas, feedback, and perceived value of the project.

Last, but Not Least: The End of the Presentation

Currently completing the first year of the League project, the Hocking team will explain the overall goals and tasks of the project and what has been accomplished. This three-year project focuses on the knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers agree are needed for twenty-first century success but that are not always taught in traditional classes.

Hocking selected the core competency, developed indicators and rubric, and developed a student brochure; six programs volunteered to pilot the program initiatives.

Why You Should Attend: Brief Description of the Session

This session will present strategies for integrating, documenting, and assessing general education requirements. Hocking College will provide an overview of its involvement in the 21st Century Learning Outcomes project sponsored by the League for Innovation in the Community College. This three-year project focuses on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that employers agree are needed for success but that are not always taught in traditional classes. Currently completing the first year-and-one-half of the League project, the Hocking team will explain the overall goals and tasks of the project and what has been accomplished.

Who Should Attend: Brief Statement of Intended Audience

The target audience is faculty, administrators, and assessment coordinators who are looking for ways to integrate, document, and assess general education.

Also, this presentation will be of benefit to institutions that are in the process of undergoing curriculum changes from an instructional-centered paradigm to a learner-centered paradigm.

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A State-Wide Initiative to Improve Academic Quality: Collaboration Between the Illinois Board of Higher Education and Public Universities

Dwight L. Smith
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History and Context

The state of Illinois has a long history of quality assurance processes in program approval and program review. Several public universities began implementing program review prior to the granting of specific authority to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) for program continuance based on educational and economic justification. Assessment of student learning became a focus of regional accreditors in the 1980s, prompted by the report, *A Nation at Risk*. Taking end-of-program assessment of student learning from plans to implementation in every program has, however, made very uneven progress in the academy.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education has been in the process of redesigning its quality assurance processes in collaboration with the public universities and community colleges since 1998. A consultant was hired to interview institutional presidents and academic officers, both public and private, and make recommendations for reducing redundancies, adding value, and increasing the focus on outcomes (from a previous focus on inputs) in all quality processes.

A Redesign Work Group of IBHE staff and public university administrators was formed in 1998 to address program approval and review processes. Several themes focused the discussions of the Redesign Work Group, including:

- less redundancy, less paperwork, less state-level review and scheduling; more institutional responsibility and accountability for quality programs and higher expectations for student learning;
- more flexibility for institutions to use existing processes to identify problem programs for improvement or temporary enrollment suspension;
- formalized feedback systems for continuous quality improvement;
- more flexibility and quicker state response time for approving new programs to meet state needs; and
- program review and assessment evidence appended to each institution's annual results report.

Concurrent with this initiative was the development of *The Illinois Commitment*, which was adopted in February 1999. Goal 5 of the *The Commitment* states: "Illinois colleges and universities will hold students to even higher expectations for learning and will be accountable for the quality of academic programs and the assessment of learning." It further states, "By 2004, *all academic* programs will systematically assess student learning and use assessment results to improve programs."

To address this goal of *The Illinois Commitment* the Redesign Work Group agreed to key guidelines of the assessment and quality requirement: (1) these efforts should be faculty, program, and campus-driven; (2) these efforts should build on existing activities; (3) these efforts should focus on the end-of-program measurement and improvement of student learning outcomes; and (4) these efforts should be a continuing process that incorporates an aggressive feedback loop.

The processes that were identified by the Redesign Work Group and that are now key elements for *The Illinois Commitment* Assessment Program are: a statement of program goals and intended student learning outcomes; an end-of-program assessment, in addition to course-by-course assessment; multiple performance measures; feedback from key stakeholders; evidence of a formal feedback/improvement mechanism; trend data; findings and recommendations for improvement; systematic dissemination of program and student learning assessment results once every eight years for programs in good standing and once every three years for new programs, programs requiring specialized accreditation for students to sit for professional licensure, and programs on an institutional or state watch list.

The results of this collaboration have been reduction of program approval requirements by one-half; reduction of program review schedule requirements to make use of discipline-specific institutional reviews or specialized accreditation reviews rather than a statewide schedule that imposed a redundant review; reduction of program review reports to findings, recommendations, and results; and an Illinois Board of Higher Education requirement of end-of-program assessment of student learning to be implemented in all programs at all public institutions by 2004.

Specific components of the redesigned processes are discussed in the following sections.

Redesign of New Program Requests

One of the earliest tasks undertaken by the Redesign Work Group centered on new program requests. By statute, the Illinois Board of Higher Education is responsible for the approval of new academic units and programs. The boards of trustees of all public universities are also responsible for approval of new academic programs and units prior to review by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. This shared responsibility required collaboration between the state agency and public universities.

Prior to the redesign initiative, new program requests emphasized the inputs required to implement a new program. There were nine categories included in the new program request with twenty-six sets of questions included.

1. Mission and priorities
2. Curriculum (including a catalog description)
3. Academic policies
4. Student information (including projected student enrollments and credit hours)
5. Statewide needs and priorities
6. Faculty and staff
7. Support services
8. Accreditation and licensure
9. Financing (including faculty and staff requirements)

Under the previous system, new programs were then included in the statewide lateral program review schedule for a review within eight years.

The new program request redesign, while still including a consideration of inputs, resulted in the introduction of outcomes, quality assurance processes, and teaching and learning as key elements of a new program request. There are eight categories with a set of questions for each in the redesigned new program request.

1. Purpose: objectives, mission, priorities
2. Student learning objectives
3. Program contributions
4. Student learning measures

5. Program outcomes
6. Curriculum
7. Instructional practices
8. Resources

A progress report from the university to the Illinois Board of Higher Education is required three years after implementation of the new program, and the new program is scheduled for a program review within eight years of implementation.

The collaboration between IBHE staff and public university representatives that occurred in the development of these new program request requirements has resulted in categories that also requires collaboration by faculty in the development of a new program request. Issues on inputs, outcomes, and pedagogy now must be addressed before a new program is approved by the campus and the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and these issues can be addressed only by the faculty of the academic program. It is hoped that these new programs will result in better designed programs for the benefit of the students and the State of Illinois.

Redesign of Program Review

The recent history of Illinois policies related to program review provides a good illustration of the challenge of achieving an appropriate level of centralized statewide oversight–a level of oversight that satisfies the need for public accountability but does not impose excessive burdens on institutions of higher education or on the staff of the coordinating board. This challenge, in part, revolves around the degree of control the coordinating board believes it must exercise over the program review schedule and the content of the reports it requires.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education has statutory responsibility to periodically review all existing units of instruction at public universities. The precise IBHE requirements for program review have evolved over the two decades during which the program review mandate has been in place. These requirements have included expectations about the length of the program review cycle and the disciplines to be reviewed in each year, expectations about topics to be addressed in each review, and expectations about the structure and content of the reports forwarded to by the institutions to the IBHE.

The situation that existed prior to the recent redesign initiative was based on policies established in the early 1990s. At that time, the IBHE instituted what was, in some ways, its most extensive and ambitious set of regulations for program review. The program review cycle for all public universities was set at eight years. Each year of the eight year cycle was dedicated to reviews of related (based on CIP code) programs. As background for the reviews conducted by the public universities, each year the IBHE staff prepared issues analysis papers highlighting national trends (e.g., enrollment, employment) for the disciplines under review. These issues papers also contained data on enrollments and numbers of graduates in the programs in disciplines up for review that year at all public and private Illinois universities and the instructional costs of programs in those disciplines at all the public universities. The issues papers also served as a vehicle for IBHE staff to identify programs at particular institutions whose values on some of the key indicators (e.g., number of graduates, student-faculty ratio) raised concerns. In such cases, it was expected that the institution's report to the IBHE would address these problematic areas.

Following the internal review, institutions were required to submit a two- to three-page summary of the status of the program covering topics prescribed by the IBHE (e.g., student demand, occupational demand, cost, quality, etc.). These summaries were reviewed by the IBHE staff, who would raise questions when warranted, requiring feedback to the IBHE.

The current redesign initiative afforded campuses and the IBHE staff the opportunity to discuss experiences in carrying out the first eight-year cycle of reviews. Several points of agreement emerged.

One major point concerned the desirability of changing the policy requiring a uniform statewide schedule of reviews. Although such a uniform schedule made sense from the perspective of the coordinating board, it created difficulty at the campus level. The difficulty centered on the increasing prevalence of professional accreditation self-studies at all the public universities. Many academic programs were in the position of having to conduct what was typically a very thorough self-study for professional reaccredidation and then shortly afterward to conduct a program review for the IBHE. Elimination of this duplication of effort, while still enabling the IBHE to fulfill its responsibilities related to program review, became one of the goals of the program review redesign process.

Additionally, both institutional representatives and the IBHE staff questioned the value of the required summaries. For the large institutions, the requirement of a two- to three-page summary for each degree program under review created a substantial—and largely repetitive—burden of report writing. For the IBHE, the requirement led to a massive amount of report reading. Moreover, both the institutions and the IBHE staff believed that the summary requirement, as structured, failed to focus on what ought to be essential about program review, namely, documentation of learning outcomes and identification of actions for program improvement.

The redesigned program review process, in effect, has struck a new balance between state and campus control over scheduling of and reporting on program reviews.

The eight-year cycle of program reviews was retained. However, the universities are permitted to determine their own schedule of reviews within the eight-year cycle. These schedules were to be reported to the IBHE, which could then verify—and continue to be able to assert—that all degree programs are reviewed at least once every eight years. Universities can now align the timing of the IBHE-mandated reviews with professional reaccreditations.

The structure and content of the program review reports to the IBHE was changed. Rather than mandated reporting on a variety of topics resulting in a two- to three-page summary, campuses now are simply required to report the "outcomes" of the program review process. Specifically, appropriate reporting consists of documentation of learning outcomes and identification of actions for program improvement. This reporting may take the form of a bulleted list. Additionally, the campuses were given responsibility for flagging programs about which there are serious concerns, with follow-up reports to the IBHE expected within three years.

The experience with the redesign of the program review process indicates that it is possible for state coordinating boards and the institutions they oversee to collaborate on developing processes that fulfill the coordinating board's responsibilities related to public accountability and quality assurance, while reducing the regulatory burden on campuses.

Redesign of Assessment Practices

Paralleling the redesign of new program requests and program review in IBHE processes, the assessment of academic programs also shifted from inputs to outcomes, with an emphasis on student learning outcomes. This change in program assessment expectations built on NCA standards introduced in the late 1980s, which were being assimilated into the culture and practices on the campuses of the state universities in Illinois. At about the same time, the standards for new or continuing accreditation of professional programs in many disciplines also began to emphasize outcomes rather than inputs. The requirements for the assessment of student learning outcomes were stated in the IBHE's statewide plan for higher education, *The Illinois Commitment*, with the expectation that by 2004 all programs would be able to show how the evidence from campus-based assessment practices would be used to demonstrate the continuous improvement of program quality and learning outcomes.

While the expectations for the assessment of program outcomes are integral to the IBHE's redesign processes, state universities have wide latitude in developing and implementing the models of and approaches to assessment that best meet their needs. Universities initially internally reallocated resources to support assessment efforts, which included hiring staff to advance assessment activities, designating faculty to coordinate assessment programs, offering support for faculty and staff attendance at assessment conferences, and/or providing funds for the implementation of specific assessment initiatives in academic programs, among others. With the implementation of *The Illinois Commitment*, the IBHE also aligned its requirements for submitting proposals for new program funding with the six goals of the statewide plan. Universities were then able to request new funding to support assessment efforts to assist them in making appropriate contributions to *Illinois Commitment* Goal 5: High Expectations and Quality. Program requests related to each of the statewide goals must all include indicators that demonstrate the achievement of outcomes.

The campus representatives who collaborated with the IBHE in these redesign processes were well aware of the elements of high quality assessment programs, and drew upon the assessment initiatives in place on their campuses to create the new requirements for program approval and review. The efforts to streamline reporting requirements to the higher board focused on the use of existing data to demonstrate program quality. For example, in accredited programs, the findings from site visits could be used as evidence of quality. In those programs that require certification or licensure, the pass rates of alumni on certification/licensure examinations in comparison to state and/or national pass rates provide data that demonstrate one aspect of quality outcomes at their respective institutions. All universities in Illinois conduct annual surveys of alumni that contain a common set of items, the results of which are reported to the IBHE, which compiles the data into a statewide report on alumni satisfaction, knowledge and skills, and employment.

This approach allows Illinois universities to use data from their assessment initiatives to demonstrate both the common outcomes of programs across the state and the unique elements that represent the mission and scope of the individual institutions, as well as their accountability for the quality of academic programs to the state coordinating board.

The redesign group is also aware of the challenges that lie ahead in fully implementing comprehensive plans to assess student learning and the quality of all academic programs that meet institutional needs and state-level reporting requirements. Some of those challenges lie in the ability to clearly articulate the expected outcomes for each academic program. For professional, accredited, and performance-based programs, the statement of outcomes is typically more easily accomplished than in humanities and social science programs, which prepare students for a wide range of careers across disciplines. Additional challenges lie in assisting faculty in the selection of an appropriate combination of direct and indirect measures to assess learning outcomes and in the use of assessment evidence to improve those outcomes. Collaboration between the university campuses and the IBHE to meet these and other challenges will continue over the next two years. Faculty and campus leaders will engage in statewide discussions, participate in workshops featuring state and national experts on outcomes assessment, and present examples of best practices within discipline-specific programs. These efforts will be coordinated by the IBHE.

The ability to provide high quality programs and to demonstrate students' achievement of learning outcomes is a dynamic process that requires the commitment of human and fiscal resources, time and energy, and continuous oversight. The ongoing collaboration between the IBHE and the state universities in the redesign of program approval and review processes exemplifies this commitment and the results that can be achieved through the partnership model adopted in Illinois.

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Accreditation and New Media: Electronic Institutional and Student Portfolios at IUPUI

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Introduction

Electronic institutional portfolios and student portfolios are emerging as a new medium for institutional accreditation. While institutional portfolios both demonstrate and enhance institutional self-evaluation, reflection, and planning, student electronic portfolios make documentation and assessment of growth and proficiency in student learning available to and customizable for a wide range of purposes and stakeholders. When electronic student and institutional portfolios are integrated, their potential usefulness for accreditation purposes is considerably strengthened. At Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis (IUPUI), the institutional portfolio is being developed as an online accreditation self-study drawing upon new forms of technology and a wide range of kinds of evidence to show how vision and values shape self-evaluation, improvement, and accountability. Its evolution simultaneously depends upon and manifests the institution's processes for strategic planning, assessment, and improvement in relation to the campus mission. Concurrently, the student electronic portfolio provides a tool for assessment at the programmatic and institutional level, particularly in relation to the transcendent skills and knowledge associated with general education. Working together, these electronic portfolios provide a selectively focused yet richly complex system of documentation of institutional processes, achievements, and improvements.

The IUPUI Institutional Portfolio

The IUPUI institutional portfolio was begun under the auspices of the Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP), a national initiative from 1998–2001 that has been featured in sessions at the previous two NCA Annual Meetings. In that three-year project, six large urban public universities developed first-generation electronic institutional portfolios focused on student learning and educational effectiveness and aimed at a broad range of internal and external stakeholder audiences. The Web makes the portfolios widely accessible and allows the display of authentic student and faculty work, including work represented in audio and video formats, as evidence of effective teaching and learning. As accountability documents, the UUPP portfolios are arguably more focused, evidence-based, authentic, and accessible than traditional paper reports aimed at demonstrating effectiveness.

A clear finding of the UUPP, however, is that electronic institutional portfolios have uses that go beyond providing evidence of learning, assessment, and effectiveness; the process of constructing a portfolio is itself a powerful catalyst for institutional self-evaluation and improvement. As parts of the portfolio are built and linked to one another, new realizations emerge about how various parts and practices of the university relate to one another. Any lack of alignment among mission, vision, values, and actual practices becomes more visible as the structure of the portfolio develops. Gaps and unmet needs in the institution's planning processes and assessment program become more obvious. In short, while the architecture of the Web portfolio demonstrates the university's mission, structures, and practices, it also can profoundly influence the reconceiving and restructuring of the institution. In this way, development of an electronic institutional portfolio can function as a way of framing and catalyzing a self-study process.

IUPUI began its institutional portfolio in the fall of 1998. Working with five other institutions, but with no prototypes to guide us, we have developed a working structure for the portfolio and have fleshed out some parts of that structure. The portfolio includes performance indicators, with information on how well we are doing on each indicator, along with other data; material on student learning outcomes, with writing being the best developed section to date; and information on current initiatives to improve student learning, retention, and persistence. Work on the portfolio is closely tied to our current strategic planning effort and has been the catalyst for several assessment and improvement initiatives that will be discussed in the proposed session.

The IUPUI Electronic Student Portfolio (ePort IUPUI)

Student electronic portfolios have the potential to make documentation and assessment of growth and proficiency in student learning available to and customizable for a wide range of purposes and stakeholders. While student electronic portfolios are not new, their utility for assessment at the programmatic and institutional level, particularly in relation to the transcendent skills and knowledge related to general education, has not been fully explored. Additionally, institutions across the country are at various stages of development of their portfolios. Some, such as Alverno and Rose-Hulman, have a mature template that reflects their assessment needs; others have only just begun talking about electronic portfolios. This situation begs the need for some case studies of works-in-progress in order to stimulate discussion of issues at the very point they are still issues in the portfolio that is being developed. That way, all participants benefit from open dialogue rather than a closed presentation of problems already solved in relation to the views of one institution. This session will present a work-in-progress, the IUPUI student electronic portfolio, now in the pilot phase of its first iteration, but embarking on a more ambitious iteration within a national consortium that includes UCLA, Penn State, and Maricopa Community College. It will also present the student electronic portfolio within the context of institutional electronic portfolios as developed by the Urban Universities Portfolio Project.

The session will focus on three major issues that plague many institutions of higher learning:

1. How to get faculty on board with assessment in a public forum.
2. How to define levels of proficiency in transcendent general education skills and knowledge.
3. How to use portfolio assessment to improve the campus climate for learning.

Connections Between the IUPUI Portfolios and Your Own Accreditation Plans

Participants will be introduced to the concept of electronic institutional portfolios and to the new possibilities for presenting and thinking about evidence of educational effectiveness that new media have opened up to us. They will see an example of an actual online portfolio and will learn about how such portfolios might be used for an accreditation or other type of self-study. Finally, we hope they will gain some insight into new ideas about accreditation: accreditors' current focus on student learning, the emphasis on evaluating institutions in the context of their specific missions, and the interest in ongoing institutional learning and improvement.

Session participants should leave the session having explored, raised questions, and found some answers to the following:

- What is an institutional portfolio?
- How might an institutional portfolio support the accreditation process?
- How might an institutional portfolio support the mission, processes, and achievements of our institution?
- Who is the audience for an institutional portfolio?
- How might a student electronic portfolio demonstrate and assess the transcendent skills of general education?
- How might student and institutional portfolios engage faculty in documenting and assessing improvement and proficiency in student learning beyond the level of individual faculty assessing individual students in their own classes?

Conclusion

New media offer powerful tools for assessment, accountability, and accreditation. Taking full advantage of the potential, however, requires a significant commitment of resources. National projects such as the UUPP, which developed the first generation of institutional portfolios, provide a model of collective experience to assist the development of future generations of portfolios. This session will share some of that experience. For more information, please contact Susan Kahn (skahn@iupui.edu) or Sharon Hamilton (shamilto@iupui.edu).

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Partners for Possibilities: The Commission, the State, and the University System

Robert Larson
Michel Hillman

Background

The colleges and universities of the North Dakota University System (NDUS) serve approximately 35,000 students on eleven campuses and other locations across the state, region, and nation. As a point of reference, the state of North Dakota has a population of 642,200 in a geographic region of 71,000 square miles. Of those 642,200 individuals, 28 percent are high school graduates and 14 percent have four-year undergraduate degrees.

In 1999, the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education completed a study of how higher education could respond to the needs of the citizens. (The North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education was a group of twenty-one legislators augmented by an additional forty leaders from government, education, and the private sector.)

The Legislative Roundtable Report identified ways in which higher education, business, and the private sector could work together. The Roundtable Report, Cornerstone #4–Accessible System reads: *"The University System, through the use of technology and with the creation of a strong customer/client service orientation, needs to create policies and practices which will make programs and services more widely available to individuals and organizations throughout the state."*

As part of the Legislative Roundtable Report, two different approaches are being considered: forty-five-minute and/or electronic access. It was requested that every citizen of the state of North Dakota be within a forty-five-minute driving time of a learning center that would provide access to delivery technologies as well as advising and tutorial assistance. At the present time, more than 32,000 North Dakota citizens are not within forty-five minutes of a learning center. With limited resources and a decreasing population base, partnerships across campus boundaries have become imperative in order to address this Roundtable Cornerstone.

In the last twenty years, the North Dakota University System has benefited from a variety of system-wide collaborations including a networked library in the Online Dakota Information Network (ODIN). This collaboration provides electronic access to the university and college libraries as well as many public libraries in North Dakota. Another such collaboration is the Higher Education Computing Network (HECN), which provides academic as well as administrative computing needs for the eleven NDUS institutions.

The institutions of the NDUS also participate in common course numbering and have implemented system-wide general education requirements. Most lower division courses (100 and 200) in the North Dakota University System also have a common number and name and similar content, allowing for ease of transfer within the North Dakota University System.

Since 1999, the state of North Dakota has been a participant in the Department of Education Financial Aid Demonstration Program. As a participant, the NDUS has been able to provide student financial aid for courses and programs that require multi-campus access during the same term. The four benchmarks established for the demonstration program are:

1. To register for courses from multiple campuses from a single campus
2. To receive one financial aid package for courses taken from multiple campuses during the same term
3. To receive a single bill for those courses
4. To generate a comprehensive academic record on the degree-granting campus

Partnerships

To address the concerns of the Legislative Council Interim Committee on Education, a collaborative was established by the presidents of the eleven campuses of the North Dakota University System for the online delivery of eLearning programs, with those programs coordinated through the North Dakota University System Online (NDUSO). (The NDUSO is a non-degree-granting entity.)

Essentially, the NDUSO provides the infrastructure to utilize the strength of each campus and to more efficiently utilize limited resources. It is able to focus the strengths and resources of each campus, including faculty expertise, technological support, instructional development, and student services. Through this collaboration, each campus can provide "anytime, anywhere" access for the citizens of North Dakota and more effectively utilize the instructional strength of its faculties and manage resources through:

- multi-campus registration, financial aid, business office, student services, etc.;
- new courses and/or program development;
- collaborations with other entities outside of the NDUS.

Implementation and Accreditation

The North Dakota University System Online is a result of discussions amongst several NDUS institutions. From those discussions, a collaboratively delivered online Associate in Arts program was designed and is being delivered. With online courses being developed on various campuses, the remaining issues were the multi-campus infrastructure protocols (registration, financial aid, business office, etc.).

During the preparation of the self-study, The Higher Learning Commission was instrumental in guiding the process and providing clarifications for the emerging multi-campus model.

The team met in Bismarck, North Dakota. To facilitate the visit, representatives from the NDUS institutions met with the team members. Prior to their arrival, they had access to a virtual Resource Room <http://www.misu.nodak.edu/access/resource/>. (The online environment of the room allowed team members to review data prior to their visit. It also made it possible to update and provide additional information as needed by the team.)

When the request to deliver online programs facilitated by the NDUSO was evaluated, the system and the team recommended monitoring of the *development of online courses and student support services in programs facilitated by the NDUSO, and the assessment of general education online.* The responsibility for this monitoring rests with the NDUSO but involves all the institutions as members of the system and included in the approval. The focused visit on the above issues is scheduled for 2003-2004. At this time, the staff of the Commission and the staff of the System Online are exploring an electronic visit, given the electronic offerings delivered in an electronic environment.

The Evaluation Team for the focused visit to the NDUSO
Dr. Jo Lynn Autry Digranes Vice-President of Academic Services and Technology Connors State College, Warner, OK
Ms. Lynette Olson Director Library/Distance Education Pine Technical College Pine City, MN
Dr. William Whitmore Tammone Dean of Arts and Sciences Montcalm Community College Sidney, MI
Dr. Edward D. Garten (Team Chair) Dean of Libraries and Information Technologies University of Dayton Dayton, OH

In their report, the evaluation team wrote:

> The request to collaboratively deliver programs at a distance, submitted by the North Dakota University System Online (NDUSO) was unusual, if not unprecedented, in many respects. As a consequence, it presented the visiting Team with several challenges. To begin with, the entity submitting the request (NDUSO) will not be degree granting and the Higher Learning Commission accredits only degree-granting institutions.

Conclusion

Fostering a collaborative model in a higher education culture that has encouraged single campus identity is the primary challenge of the process. Doing business in a new way and developing a level of trust amongst the campuses has been and continues to be the challenge of this collaborative model.

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Assessing a Cooperative Economic Development Project

James "Whit" Roberts
Sid Hudson
M. Richard Hackett

Higher education has become increasingly involved in a wide range of programs and initiatives dealing with efforts to aid economic development. Evaluation of these efforts is difficult. Most of the projects do not have any directly measurable short-term outcomes. Their contributions to economic development are often slow in developing, secondary in nature, and subtle. Several techniques are being evaluated to see if they are useful in assessing the effectiveness of the programs.

This assessment effort attempts to evaluate a cooperative economic development program *(The Network)* involving a public regional university and three community colleges. This program was funded by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) to serve a sixteen-county area with a history of below average income and high unemployment. The original primary goal was to use the state Internet system to facilitate communications between various groups concerned with economic development.

Most of the efforts of the program were designed to help develop a more efficient flow of information, increase contacts between interested parties, provide expertise, and help develop a culture of economic development. All of these present difficulties in assessing their role and value in aiding development.

A major issue in this assessment is that the program has been very flexible in its operation so that it could be responsive to changing needs and demands. Because the program is evolving, its goals, its strategies, and therefore, its outcomes are in a continual state of flux.

Compounding the general problem of assessing the outcomes is the fact that there are several different perspectives on the evaluation. These include the state regents (the funding source), the regional university's administration (the lead institution), the three community colleges' administrations, the program director, the steering committee, The Network partners, and the user community.

Much of the feedback from the clients and partners and the evaluation of The Network is informal. These sources have proved to be highly valuable and as useful as formal procedures in altering the operations and in planning the activities of The Network.

A plan for assessing each phase of the project and related individual activities was included in the initial proposal for funding. This assessment largely consisted of a log of the phases and activities and their status such as pending, in progress, or completed. Qualitative aspects of the assessment were mostly in the form of written comments from participants in activities and users of services.

Each of the five goals of The Network had a series of proposed strategies to accomplish the individual goals and then a series of evaluation methods to assess the activities. One of the problems with this approach has been that the project has changed dramatically since its inception. The five goals themselves have undergone a *de facto* alteration as the project moved forward. The importance of developing new businesses and expanding existing ones has come to the forefront. The need for improved linkages and increasing collaborations also has been shown. The goals and strategies overlap and the focus is continually shifting to meet the needs of the stakeholders. With these caveats in mind, the planned assessment techniques still have been used and are of much value.

The project was divided into six phases, with phase six being the evaluation phase. This phase was to operate continually throughout the project. Its purpose was to ensure that The Network was accomplishing it goals. These evaluations were to take six specific forms. The first was to be logs of the activities of the Web sites and the activities of the employees of The Network. The second was participant surveys designed for the individual activities undertaken by The Network. These surveys have been an excellent source of feedback about the effectiveness of the various activities and have been a key to shifting the focus of activities. The third has been analyses reports that have been used to analyze the degree of effectiveness of The Network in meeting specific goals. One of the needs that has become increasingly apparent has been for student internships with various stakeholders. When interns have been placed, evaluation of their value and performance has been done by the agency providing the internship. These comprised the fourth type of assessment. The fifth evaluation activity has been a survey of the partners of The Network concerning the overall effectiveness of The Network. The sixth method is an annual report to the OSHRE.

One major problem is that none of the evaluation techniques is quantifiable in any meaningful way. Since this is a pilot project, another limitation is a lack of an established norm for such a project.

Two assessment methods were added as the project changed. The first was a concept in self-evaluation modified from business strategic planning. This is the SWOT technique of evaluating the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This type of analysis is often used to made rapid changes in the focus or direction of the organization and to evaluate both the internal and external SWOT components of the organization (Pearce and Robinson 1994).

A SWOT of The Network was completed by the director, a member of the steering committee, and an outside consultant. The following is a summary of the results of this evaluation.

- **Strengths**
    - Flexibility
    - Responsiveness to client needs
    - Telecommunication network in place
    - Ability to deliver services across the entire sixteen counties
    - Local credibility tied to the four institutions of higher education
    - Resources in place: REMI, people in The Network
- **Weaknesses**
    - Institutions are new to this type of effort
    - Lack of awareness of importance of ED efforts
    - Lack of awareness of public about The Network
    - No full-time area coordinators
    - Some areas have been better served and more involved than others
- **Opportunities**
    - Greater Internet presence
    - Expansion of subject fields
    - Numerous communities still uninvolved
    - Develop new partners
    - Strengthen existing partnerships
    - Increase training in technology and information use
    - Alternative funding sources

- **Threats**
  - Funding in danger of cuts or total withdrawal
  - Lack of willingness of some to share information
  - Unrealistic expectations of clients
  - ED turf issues
  - Differing priorities

The SWOT results closely paralleled the results of surveys of the partners and users of The Network. The SWOT showed that The Network has been flexible and responsive. It also has provided a variety of activities to the region. However, several opportunities and threats were apparent. The biggest threat may be to funding.

The second added method of assessing The Network has been to evaluate the project in terms of research on general trends economic development and on economic development efforts in rural areas.

The November 2001 issue of the trade magazine *Expansion Management* featured an article entitled, "How the Internet Impacts the Site Selection Process" (Yoder 2001). The article pointed out the importance of an Internet presence for a community to be included as a possible site for new or expanded business. The importance of quality information and good links to other useful sites was stressed. These have been goals of The Network from the start.

The Center for the Study of Rural America held a conference on Exploring Policy Options for a New Rural America in the spring of 2001. In the proceedings of that conference, several studies confirmed the importance of efforts like The Network.

> Telecommunications was viewed as a necessary condition for rural development. Successful communities are those with links to outside knowledge (Malecki 2001).
>
> There is a need to create institutions to foster networks and synergies among local businesses and local public officials. Building networks encourages interaction that will increase information sharing that otherwise might not occur. The more informed businesses are, the more likely they are to be successful (Malecki 2001).
>
> Networks are particularly important to entrepreneurship. They provide a method to share ideas and to find help with common problems. They can also provide information about the multitude of programs and agencies that are often otherwise unknown to entrepreneurs (Dabson 2001).

Rural America, published by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has had several articles that also confirm that the activities of The Network are moving in the right direction. These articles included the following conclusions.

> Rural colleges need to play the role of catalyst in economic development (Rosenfield 2001).
>
> There is a growing realization that rural areas have to build their own economies (Rosenfield 2001).
>
> Higher education should help mobilize regional leadership and promote entrepreneurship and small business development (Rubin 2001).
>
> Creative alliances between higher education, businesses, and local, state, and federal agencies are required (Liston and Swanson 2001).

All of these had become part of the project before the publication of the articles. Based on these and other studies, The Network seems to be working in the right direction. The problem of how to directly measure the impact of these efforts remains.

The Network will continue to use all of the methods of assessment. Each has proven to be valuable. The planned assessment provides a baseline for comparison of future activities and will allow for limited qualitative analysis. The SWOT method is very useful for rapid evaluation and continual reassessment of a dynamic project. The continued use of research and trends in rural economic development can be used to compare The Network to similar projects and to provide a catalyst for change. Feedback from the partners, users, and community will remain a critical aspect of the ongoing assessment process.

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Note

Dr. Buddy Gastor, Dean of Business, Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, Oklahoma, is a consultant for The Network and contributed to this paper.

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Part 1

Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 2

Validating Quality in eLearning

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 23 – 26, 2002
Hyatt Regency Chicago

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A Distance Education Assessment Tool for Institutions and Consultant-Evaluators

Sue Day-Perroots
Bruce Flack

How do you assure and measure quality for education delivered at a distance? This is a nagging question that has troubled distance education providers for more than a generation. Skepticism and distance education have always gone hand-in-hand. From the early days of instructional television to today's electronically delivered instruction, the quality of the educational service has been subject to intense scrutiny. The academy has demanded greater assurances of quality for distance education than have ever been raised for conventional classroom instruction. Despite the publication of numerous studies that attest to the quality of distance education and the development of guidelines for assuring best practices, doubts remain. Yet, raising high expectations for quality in education at a distance has been positive. It has helped create a better product, and it has resulted in the establishment of a significant number of quality controls, some of which have been embraced by the regional accrediting bodies in the nation.

Background

An essential element of accreditation is institutional self-evaluation. The ever-changing and competitive nature of distance education has proven to be a moving target for° standardized assessment. In fact, the term *standardization* may be perceived as oxymoronic to distance education, where the unconventional and evolving are more the norm. Major steps have been taken to provide institutions and consultant-evaluators with guidelines for assessing electronically delivered programs. This paper examines the distance education landscape and offers an assessment tool based upon the document, *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs.*

Distance education has moved from the periphery and is drawing closer to the center of institutional mission. This movement becomes more critical as analysts predict a growth rate of 33 percent over the next several years in distance education enrollments. Estimates further indicate that the U.S. distance education market will grow from $16 million in 1997 to $1.57 billion in 2002 (Oblinger, Barone, and Hawkins 2001). New educational enterprises are entering the educational marketplace to capitalize on these lifelong learning trends of a mobile and wired population. In addition, the networked world has surpassed the expectations not only of educational institutions, but of public policy as well. The legal system is challenged to revise laws to address digital transmission, intellectual property, and copyright issues. Meanwhile, the public is raising concerns on academic accountability; state, interstate, and global regulation; and cost.

The emergence of nontraditional and virtual education providers has further challenged accrediting agencies to respond to public concerns. Colleges are investing in distance education to address increased market demand without increasing physical facilities while attempting to remain competitive in the dot-com marketplace. Institutions serving regional and global markets also began pushing policymakers to reduce regulation and barriers for electronically delivered programs. According to Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, "Accreditors, whose first and foremost task is to examine how higher education operates, must take responsibility for examining these challenges and the variations distance learning introduces into higher education operation. Only if accreditors take such responsibility can they remain credible and continue to play their vital role in protecting the independence of higher education through self-regulation" (Eaton, 2001).

Foundation

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education to investigate "Balancing Quality and Access: Reducing State Policy Barriers to Electronically Delivered Higher Education Programs." This three-year project was designed to stimulate discussions and establish a foundation that encouraged electronic delivery of quality higher education programs across state lines. The product, *Best Practices for Electronically Delivered Degree and Certificate Programs*, evolved from representatives from Western Interstate's higher education regulating agencies, colleges, and universities, and the regional accrediting community.

The research was not an attempt to compare distance education to traditional campus structures, but rather to offer principles that would be useful to institutions offering electronically delivered programs. As the higher education community increasingly expands educational opportunities through electronically offered programming, the regional commissions are challenged to support criteria for good practices in distance education among affiliated colleges and universities. To this end, each commission adopted and implemented a common statement of *Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs* developed by the earlier work of the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET), resulting in a shared approach to distance education. The *Principles of Good Practice* became the foundation for further research. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions provided funding for a more detailed elucidation of those elements that exemplify quality in distance education.

Based upon the expertise of WCET and the already substantial experience of the regional commissions in assessing distance education, the resulting statement, *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*, provides a comprehensive and detailed assessment of what is considered current best practice. It is being utilized by each commission, compatibly with its policies and procedures, to promote good practice and self-regulation in distance education among its affiliated colleges and universities. Furthermore, each of the eight regional accrediting commissions developed a statement of commitment supporting the *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* (2001).

Quality Standard Across Regions

The statement of commitment recognized the *Best Practices* document as a work in progress, but declared it a common standard for regional accrediting commissions. The statement of commitment establishes an evaluative framework for quality standards across all regions.

- First time development of distance education programming leading to a degree designated for students off campus will be subject to careful prior review.
- Institutional effectiveness in providing education will be explicitly and rigorously appraised as a part of the regular evaluation of colleges' and universities' comprehensive visits and interim reports.
- An essential element in all evaluative processes will be institutional self-evaluation for the purpose of enhancing quality.
- In cases where deficiencies and/or concerns regarding integrity are identified, remediation will be expected and aggressively monitored.
- Appropriate action will be taken in keeping with individual commission policies and procedures in those cases where an institution is found to be demonstrably incapable of offering distance education programming.

This framework and the *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* provide institutions with challenges and a wealth of questions important for institutional self-assessment, yet the breadth and depth of accountability can appear vast and daunting to institutions that are attempting to validate quality in their electronically delivered programs.

The Assessment Tool

Various organizations are also identifying measures of quality in distance education, but the shared commitment of regional accrediting commissions, places the *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* at the forefront for its implications and application to accredited institutions. There is much overlap among these measures, as can be seen with the quality benchmarks outlined by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (Oblinger 2000). The five primary components are

1. Institutional context and commitment
2. Curriculum and instruction
3. Faculty support
4. Student support
5. Evaluation and assessment

Each component is introduced with a general statement. The statements are followed by numbered paragraphs with specific questions that assist in identifying protocols for assessment. This organization works well for the consultant-evaluator who, as with traditional accreditation review, begins with examination of institutional mission; the same applies to electronically delivered degree or certificate programs. However, if one tries to encompass all the questions or protocols listed under each segment, the comprehensive nature of the items can become too overwhelming to assess with clarity. While the caliber and depth of the questions in *Best Practices* is impressive, simplification of the format facilitates a more practical application. A chart has been developed to provide an assessment tool for consultant-evaluators and distance educators (www.wvu.edu/exlearn/faculty/index.htm). While it is designed to provide a brief overview of each of the components, it also can assist in identifying areas that need further assessment or may not be applicable to a specific program. Utilizing this instrument as a formative evaluation tool also provides periodic assessment of overall programmatic or institutional progress.

Conclusion

Regional accrediting commissions have collaborated to respond to quality standards in distance education. This collaboration is critical as distance learning complicates and challenges the fundamental relationship between higher education and the federal government (Eaton 2001). For the federal government to continue its support of higher education's distance education efforts, quality assurances across all regions must be established. Thus higher education self-regulation based upon sound institutional accountability in distance education provides required assurances that federal funds are spent wisely. This assessment tool based upon sound research is one instrument in that assurance.

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Grounding Outcomes Assessment in General Systems Theory: The Search for Evidence in an Online Program

Edward L. McGlone
Timothy M. Downs

Introduction

A theoretical basis for outcomes assessment is rarely asserted. Some writers acknowledge a connection with the TQM or "quality" movement. Most assert that assessment is an ongoing process of gathering and analyzing data to document, explain, and improve performance (Angelo 1995). But the incentive for assessment is usually explained as a requirement that is imposed for reasons of accreditation and/or accountability.

The recent Levels of Implementation (Higher Learning Commission 2001) describes mature assessment programs as having evolved to a "culture of evidence" where assessment data are employed routinely and widely by faculty, students, and administrators for determining achievement of objectives and as a basis for change and decision making. Possibly, skillful leadership and dutiful compliance will attain such a culture. Our experience suggests that grounding assessment in an influential theory with substantial explanatory value can assist the maturation process considerably.

This assessment of online programs is particularly important. Some faculty are suspicious of the quality of these programs (AAUP 1998), and often faculty ownership is weak. Outreach or continuing education offices usually administered online programs, and a tension may exist between maintaining high quality and commercial goals. An academic "culture" can be lacking when students are physically separate from each other and their instructors. In an attempt to ensure quality assessment of these programs, the eight regional accrediting associations issued the *Statement of Commitment by the Regional Accrediting Commissions for the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* (Higher Learning Commission 2000).

General Systems Theory

The theory we propose as the basis for outcomes assessment is general systems theory. Conceptualized by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1956, 1968), general systems theory emphasizes global perception, unifies and concentrates on the interactions among elements, studies the effects of relationships and interactions, and advocates exhaustive (hermeneutic) study of what is functioning in the system. To a certain extent, systems theory provides groundwork for the development of the Internet as well as the quality movement. Systems theory is an accepted approach to data-based decision making and action taking in engineering and some social sciences. Forensic science as practiced on the popular television series, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, illustrates general systems theory. Systems theory requires us to regard an academic program as a system, connected to other systems, functioning in a complex environment with inputs from and outputs to that environment. The search for evidence of learning (disconfirming as well as confirming) is continuous and exhaustive. Analysis of the evidence provides both explanation and evaluation of the learning process.

Assessment Plan

We applied our understanding of systems theory as the basis for an ongoing assessment of an existing online academic program at Emporia State University: the Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS). Launched in 1999, the BIS is an electronically delivered (via the World Wide Web) degree completion program intended for place-bound adult students. The program seeks to develop competencies in communication, information literacy, problem solving/decision making, and community leadership. The program requires 75 credit hours beyond general education requirements, including a portfolio that demonstrates competencies and synthesis of academic and life experiences, and a capstone experience.

The Assessment Team includes faculty who teach in the program, the BIS advisor, the outreach staff, an instructional designer, several BIS students, the dean of lifelong learning, and other resource persons as needed. Our primary audiences are the faculty who teach in the program and the students, rather than The Higher Learning Commission or any other external agency.

The direct measures of performance include (1) the ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP): reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking; (2) portfolio evaluation of critical thinking, communication, information literacy, problem solving/decision making, and community leadership; and (3) capstone evaluation of program goal achievement and a synthesis of academic and life experience. The indirect measures include (1) a comprehensive student survey; (2) a faculty survey of attitudes toward online instruction, quality of BIS students, and recommended changes; and (3) a placement study. (Please write to the authors for copies of these instruments and reports.)

The team attempts to view the BIS program as a system, to collect data about ALL that is happening (functioning) in the system, and to make changes to enhance the student experience. This involves a cyclical process in which data and interpretation are integrated, there are multiple sources of data and interpretation within each cycle, and there is regular acknowledgement of the need to improve both the data and the interpretations. The search for disconfirming evidence is part of the systems process.

Outcomes and Changes

During the first year, the team was able to document twelve outcomes (see Table 1) ranging from improvement in critical thinking ability to satisfactory placement of graduates. The same period yielded twenty-three decisions to add services or change the program (see Table 2), e.g., courses dropped, addition of writing assignments in all classes, establishment of an electronic "Reserve Book Room."

Table 1

Outcomes from Assessment of BIS Program

BIS students score well above average college students in writing, reading, and critical thinking skills; they score about average in mathematics skills.
Faculty review of portfolios and capstone projects indicate strong achievement in writing ability and problem solving/critical thinking.
There is a question about whether the students have participated much in community leadership and even whether this should be a legitimate program objective.
Faculty reviews of portfolios and capstones indicate that BIS students are able to synthesize academic and life experiences more effectively than on-campus students.
Placement data: half of the BIS graduates have management positions in government or industry, several have entered graduate school, one has entered law school, one is now teaching in England, one is now working as a computer technician, and one owns his own business.
Most BIS students are quite pleased with their experiences in the program.
Students view the program as one tailored to their needs that helps them to meet personal and career goals.
Students rate very highly the quality of the faculty and most of the courses they have taken.
Students rate their educational experiences as comparable to or exceeding their experiences in traditional programs.
Students rate the quality of the library and financial aid services as satisfactory.
Students rate very highly the quality of the registration and other services provided by the office of lifelong learning.
Students rate highly most aspects of the advisement they have received, but they are less positive about the advisement concerning career opportunities.
Students have virtually no contact with counseling services for personal, as opposed to academic, problems. They do not express any great need for such services.

Table 2
Additions and Changes Based on Assessment of BIS Program

- New required course in portfolio development
- Portfolios reviewed by faculty committee at end of first semester
- All courses taken by BIS students must be "writing intensive"
- Revision of assignments to emphasize active learning
- Addition of message boards to all courses
- Addition of chat rooms to many courses
- Solicitation of new courses from "best" faculty
- Three courses dropped from BIS offerings
- Toll-free phone number
- Newsletter
- BIS "chat room" for students in the program
- Peer mentoring
- Events on ESU campus
- ESU merchandise (T-shirts and souvenirs) online
- Online access to catalogs, periodical indexes, and bibliographic databases
- Electronic "Reserve Book Room"
- Interlibrary loan accessed via e-mail
- Blackboard Course Info gradually replacing WebCT and WCB
- Changes in staffing of online courses
- BIS students free to propose online courses and other courses not originally associated with program
- Help lines for both software and hardware problems. Faculty discouraged from using listservs; encouraged to respond to e-mail messages promptly
- Faculty encouraged to require textbook, rather than online reading assignments

Conclusions

In our view, this assessment is successful. The program objectives do not limit our search for evidence. Students and faculty alike are impressed by the amount of data we collect, but they are more impressed by the number of changes that result from our interpretations of and reflections on the data.

The fact that we are trying something new undoubtedly influences our success. However, the attempt to apply general systems theory also contributes to this success and provides enhanced understanding of the online learning experience. The assessment process is now a "research project," much more interesting to the team members than preparing an administrative report. The cycles we use (plan, act, observe, reflect) permit us to revise our questions and opinions and to focus on agreements as well as disagreement. In our discussions, we achieve a level of dialectic that leads us to confident decisions. Most importantly, we use the evidence we accumulate as the basis for improving the learning experience we provide for our students.

Our BIS program benefits from this assessment. Our focus is not on accreditation. Clearly though, we are better prepared to meet external agency requirements because of the assessment experience.

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e-Learning: Addressing the Challenges via Collaboration

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Colleges planning to offer online programs of study face several challenges, some related to program development, others related to program delivery, and still others related to providing support for students as they proceed through the programs.

The principal challenge associated with online program development is a lack of resources for curriculum and course development–human resources (faculty, instructional designers, technicians); financial resources; and technical resources. A quality online program requires that all the program-specific courses, all the required general education courses, and a reasonable selection of elective courses be available online. The history of online course development at Michigan community colleges has been fairly similar, where interested individual faculty from a wide variety of disciplines have transitioned some of their courses to an online format. This has resulted in each college having a smorgasbord of online courses available, but rarely are all the courses necessary to complete an online program of study available at a single college.

Colleges face similar challenges in the delivery of online programs of study. To a student, the value of an online program is diminished considerably if all the required courses aren't available on a regular basis, preferably every semester. Faculty teaching online courses, however, are faced with multiple demands on their time; in addition to teaching online sections, they may be asked to allocate time to develop new online courses, and they most likely have continuing responsibilities for teaching traditional courses. All these factors have resulted in an inability on the part of most colleges to offer enough online sections to meet student demand, and certainly the unavailability of courses may impact the ability of students to complete a program of study.

Finally, the challenges colleges face in providing academic and student support services cannot be overlooked. In many respects, online students differ little from their more traditional counterparts They need access to library resources, academic advising, financial aid, tutoring, and other support services. In addition, some online courses require proctored testing as a component of course assessment.

Addressing the Challenges

Many colleges have recognized that one way each of the challenges above can be addressed effectively and efficiently is through collaboration. As Michigan community colleges began to consider the possibilities for online programming, they recognized that emerging information technologies made it possible to work together in unprecedented ways. Given that there is no statewide governing authority for community colleges in Michigan, and that individual colleges have considerable autonomy, the decision to collaborate was entirely voluntary rather than imposed. Within this environment, planning for what eventually became the Michigan Community College Virtual Learning Collaborative (MCCVLC) began in 1997, and almost two years were spent in identifying strategic goals for the collaborative and preparing a business plan. This plan involved adoption of a variation of the "home college/provider college" model (with instruction delivered by the provider college and some support services provided by the home college).

The resulting strategic and business plan included a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which established a general framework for cooperation in the development and delivery of online courses and programs, the provision of professional development opportunities, and the provision of academic and student support services for online learners. This MOU would provide a stable and well-understood basis for subsequent collaboration. It included the following:

- Home college responsibilities
- Provider college responsibilities
- Common tuition structure for online courses
- Tuition sharing between provider college and home college
- Articulation agreement
- Financial aid agreement
- Guidelines for online programs of study

A staff task force, with representation from each Michigan community college, was instrumental in developing the strategic plan and Memorandum of Understanding. The membership of the task force was not just distance learning specialists, but included expertise from instruction and student services. This staff task force continues to function as the MCCVLC Advisory Council and meets several times each year.

Perhaps the most unique feature of the advisory council is not the committee composition or responsibility, but the method of meeting. The advisory council meets three times a semester utilizing up to twelve interactive video sites throughout the state. While it initially took some time and effort to become effective in conducting meetings in this fashion, it's the only conceivable way to regularly bring these busy individuals together in a state as large as Michigan. If the advisory council were forced to rely on traditional, face-to-face meetings, both frequency and participation rates would doubtless suffer.

With the planning that had taken place and the MOU that clearly defines the relationships between and among the colleges, the MCCVLC began a pilot program in the summer of 1999. After completing a year of pilot operations, the MCCVLC is successfully completing a second year of full implementation. During these three years of operation, significant capacity to offer and support online courses has been developed: For the winter semester of 2002, more than five hundred courses (offered by twenty-five of the twenty-eight Michigan community colleges) are listed in the online catalog. Student interest in these courses is reflected in the enrollment trends; total enrollment in these courses was over 8,300 in the fall of 2001, up from 4450 a year earlier in the fall of 2000.

MCCVLC Enrollment Trends

Summer 1999	**Summer 2000**	**Summer 2001**
Provider colleges: 12	Provider colleges: 14	Provider colleges: 17
Courses available: 47	Courses available: 100	Courses available: 174
Total VLC enrollments: 45	Total VLC enrollments: 116	Total VLC enrollments: 182
Total enrollments: >700	Total enrollments: >1660	Total enrollments: >3280
Fall 1999	**Fall 2000**	**Fall 2001**
Provider colleges: 17	Provider colleges: 22	Provider colleges: 22
Courses available: 133	Courses available: 285	Courses available: 453
Total VLC enrollments: 60	Total VLC enrollments: 212	Total VLC enrollments: 270
Total enrollments: >1800	Total enrollments: >4450	Total enrollments: >8300
Winter 2000	**Winter 2001**	**Winter 2002**
Provider colleges: 19	Provider colleges: 22	Provider colleges: 25
Courses available: 203	Courses available: 296	Courses available: >500
Total VLC enrollments: 147	Total VLC enrollments: 212	Total VLC enrollments: N/A
Total enrollments: >3200	Total enrollments: >5200	Total enrollments: N/A

It is significant to note that while there are more than five hundred courses available from twenty-five provider colleges, all courses are available from a single Web site: http://www.mccvlc.org. Academic and student support services are available from that Web site as well.

Collaborative Program Development

Collaborative programming has proved challenging, and though the MCCVLC is early in the collaborative development of programs and courses, the efforts seem to be well worthwhile. Given that a single college rarely has the resources to develop and offer the full complement of online courses for a program of study, collaborative programming is a viable approach. The processes established by the MCCVLC are being used in the development of fifteen collaborative online programs, and it is anticipated that other programs will follow. Collaborative online programming also makes it possible for a participating college to provide a program to its community without bearing the entire cost of program development.

In the case of program development, colleges are discovering that by utilizing the Articulation Agreement, they can recommend that students complete an equivalent course from another Michigan community college to fulfill a program requirement. In some cases where programs are being developed collaboratively, this sharing of courses within a program of study is actually planned; in other cases, colleges will find an equivalent course in the online catalog that is already available from another college. Regardless of whether it's planned or not, the MCCVLC Memorandum of Understanding and Articulation Agreement make it possible for colleges to collaborate and share resources in the development of online programming.

Collaboratively Developed Programs

Program Title	Lead College	Partner College	Partner College	Partner College
Banking/Finance Certificate	Glen Oaks	West Shore		
Certification Preparation	Kellogg	Lansing	Schoolcraft	
Criminal Justice	Delta	West Shore	Northwestern	
Diagnostic Medical Sonography	Jackson	Kellogg	Mid-Michigan	
Early Childhood Education	North Central	Grand Rapids		
Network Administrator	Northwestern	Grand Rapids	Henry Ford	Oakland
Nursing–ADN	Northwestern	Jackson	Kellogg	St. Clair
Social Work Technician	Glen Oaks	Kellogg		
Web Administrator	Northwestern	Grand Rapids	Henry Ford	Oakland
AAS–Social Work	Glen Oaks	Kellogg		
Breast Imaging Certificate	Kellogg	Jackson		
Customer Energy Specialist	Jackson	Northwestern		
Health Insurance Coder/Biller	Glen Oaks	Jackson		
Technology Job Readiness	Kellogg	Schoolcraft		
LPN to RN Degree Program	Kirtland	Monroe	Kalamazoo Valley	

Critical to the success of program and course development, whether collaborative not, is the professional development of faculty and staff. For an individual college administration, it's often difficult to identify the appropriate training and make it available. The MCCVLC has been able to offer frequent, high quality professional development activities for all Michigan community colleges at per-college costs substantially below those the colleges would incur by providing similar training on their own. Well over eight hundred faculty, staff, and administrators have participated in the collaborative professional development over the past year.

December 1999	Kellogg Grant Project Training	62 participants
January 2000	Collaborating for Connected Education	135 participants
February-April 2000	Mini-Session Webcasts: LMS training	28 participants
May 2000	Distributed Learning Workshop	75 participants
May 2000	MCCVLC/ETOM Higgins Lake Retreat	65 participants
June 2000	Blackboard Administrator Training	17 participants
August 2000	Distributed Learning Workshop	45 participants
October 2000	Enrollment Administrators Workshop	39 participants
November 2000	Webmaster Workshop	49 participants
November 2000	MCCVLC Distributed Learning Workshop	52 participants
February 2001	Blackboard Administrators Workshop	26 participants
April 2001	Enrollment Administrators Workshop	50 participants
April 2001	Academic Systems Open	22 participants
April 2001	Blackboard Administrators	28 participants
May 2001	Webmaster Workshop	44 participants

May 2001	Distributed Learning Workshop	55 participants
May 2001	Blackboard 5 Update Workshop	11 participants
May 2001	Higgins Lake Retreat-D/L Quality	70 participants
August 2001	Distributed Learning Workshop	40 participants
August 2001	Using NETg Learning Objects	10 participants
November 2001	Distributed Learning Workshop	37 participants
November 2001	WIDS Handshake Workshop	30 participants

Collaborative Program Delivery

Colleges anticipate that the challenges of program delivery will also be eased by collaboration, such that each college may not find it necessary to offer every course within every program each semester. An equivalent course from another Michigan community college will serve the student just as well, as long there is no question about the transferability. Formal approval of the MCCVLC Memorandum of Understanding and Articulation Agreement ensure that if the course equivalency is listed in the online course catalog, that the course will, in fact, transfer.

Academic and Student Support Services

Offering courses and programs in an online environment involves not only the faculty and distance learning staff, but also almost every academic and student services function on a college campus. The challenges associated with providing academic and student support services for online learners vary greatly depending on the service in question, the particular student, and the situation, but the challenges are often exacerbated by the fact that utilizing technology may not be the optimal solution in a case where technology is part of the underlying problem. Recognition that personal contact may be the optimal way to provide student services was a critical factor in Michigan community colleges developing a "provider college/home college" model for the MCCVLC. Examples of student services that may be more effectively provided by the home college are:

- Awarding of financial aid
- Test proctoring
- Access to and support for technology/computers
- Advising/counseling

The MCCVLC Guidelines for Online Programs (part of the MOU) are more specific in identifying the requirements for information and services to be made available online (or through the use of other common technologies) by the provider college, as well as the expectations of each college in the capacity of home college. The colleges have agreed that it is the responsibility of the provider college to provide the following for each program of study offered through the MCCVLC:

- Authoritative program information will be available online
    - Requirements for program completion (including any activities that may not be completed online)
    - Program costs
    - Technology requirements
- Program advisement information
    - Name and title of program advisor(s)
    - E-mail address of program advisor(s)
    - Phone number of program advisor(s)
- Program admission requirements and procedures
- Access to required software, media, and/or other course materials
- Financial aid for students enrolled in program
- Help desk for any program-specific technologies

Provider colleges are expected to make the above services directly available to students and prospective students, since it is unreasonable to expect colleges that do not have faculty and staff with expertise in the program of study to be able to provide this support. It should be noted that while the home college may have expertise in the area of financial aid to provide support to students, in many cases financial aid must be provided by the institution offering the program of study in which the student is enrolled—which is, of course, the provider college.

On the other hand, it is not unreasonable to expect that a student enrolled in an online program of study could access some services at the local home college, albeit with some limitations. It may be most convenient for a student to use the home college library for research and resources, for example, but it is unreasonable to expect that the home college will have an equivalent collection to the provider college. The librarians at Michigan community colleges have agreed to provide inter-library loans at no cost to MCCVLC students as a partial remedy to this difficulty.

Students may benefit from other services at the home college as well: orientation (particularly orientation for distance learners), placement services, and help desk services. Clearly, the home college help desk will be able to provide only general assistance rather than help for program-specific technologies (which is included in the responsibilities of the provider college). The testing center directors at Michigan community colleges have spent considerable time and effort establishing protocols to be used for proctoring tests for MCCVLC students in an effort to make test proctoring a relatively convenient service at the home college.

It has been the experience of the MCCVLC over the past three years that student services for online learners are best developed and delivered, not by some specialized organization dedicated only to online learning, but rather by the professionals traditionally responsible for providing the services at each campus. These professionals have the most expertise in their respective areas, and generally find that most of the issues with online learners are very similar to those faced by traditional learners, the primary difference being that the communication medium and techniques are changed.

Conclusions

Michigan community colleges have addressed the challenges of developing online programs by pooling their resources in a "provider college/home college model" and by using collaborative efforts to offer fifteen complete online certificate or degree programs, and more than five hundred individual courses each semester through the Michigan Community College Virtual Learning Collaborative. The presidents of all twenty-eight community colleges facilitated this achievement by agreeing to a Memorandum of Understanding and a Program Agreement document, a major accomplishment in a state that has no governing board for community colleges and where local board authority usually prevails. The total MCCVLC online enrollment in the fall of 2001 reached 8,300, an 86.5 percent increase over the previous fall. Based on the MOU, student services are usually provided to online students by the student's home college.

Our future challenges include: (1) the development of a more streamlined transcript process, since there is no common course numbering system in Michigan; (2) implementing an assessment standard, which is especially challenging for general education programs; and (3) developing a process for updating collaboratively developed courses and programs. By pooling resources, through collaborative efforts, and with the structure provided by the MCCVLC, Michigan community colleges are meeting the challenges of online program development, program and course delivery, and student support services.

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Promoting Your Online Courses via a Web Site

Tom Seymour

You have to have an excellent Web site to promote your online courses to the public. There are many techniques and processes that will give your Web site the necessary visibility to attract visitors for online class registrations. This discussion will revolve around the key elements that will promote your online course Web site and increase your online course enrollments. There is quite a lot involved in setting up a Web site, and it can take some time to create an online portal that draws in many online course registrations. It is important to continue research in the area of how students are attracted to online learning Web sites.

Keywords: Web site development, online courses, WebCT, Web promotion

Introduction

You don't have to have a comprehensive Web site to promote your online classes via the Internet, but if you don't you are missing out on a huge opportunity. All universities delivering online courses have Web sites and are working on improving Web presence. Your Web site can be your operational headquarters, the center around which your online class promotions are based. It seems, in fact, that many of the schools that are choosing to promote online classes with little Web site support are spammers–schools using e-mail spam as their only promotional tool.

Most professors reading this material, promoting online classes, probably have a Web site. That is easy enough, isn't it? Every school and its partner corporation seem to have Web sites these days. You get an Internet account with an ISP or use your university server; these servers give you some Web space; and you set up your Web site. You are soon delivering online classes to the world. The reality is very different. Sure, it is easy to set up a Web site with a few pictures of your spouse, kids, and assorted pets. But if you are in the business of delivering online classes from your Web portal, your needs are more complicated.

What Do Students Look for on Your Web Site

Online student behavior is not always predictable. Take "eye-tracking"–the way your eyes move as you search for information. You pick up the *Minot Daily News*, your eyes go for the pictures first. So it should follow that the same thing will happen when you sit in front of a computer screen, right?

Well, the students at Minot State University discovered that when folks read news online, their eyes go for the text first, particularly captions and summaries, and move to graphics only later. Sometimes much later. Sometimes not at all! This has made a lot of commercial copywriters happy. It has also heralded a new field of inquiry: how folks scan Web sites for information.

Why is this information critical for you? If you know how people gather information visually from their browser windows, you have a powerful design tool you can use right now to support your mission of persuading your visitors to take the action you want. So, how do they do it?

When a user lands on your Web site, the visitor gives the window a quick scan that starts at the top left, moves quickly across the center to the right, then returns leftward, again crossing center, as the visitor works his/her way down. (Note that this is the pattern for Western cultures.) All this happens in seconds, without the user's necessarily fixing a gaze until reaching the center of the display as the user is coming back. This also usually happens without the visitor's being aware of it. If you know how people scan, you have a template for placing things on your Web site so your visitors will find what they are looking for where they expect to find it and the what that engages the visitor best.

Don't think of it as limiting your artistic freedom; think of it as knowledge you can use to meet your online students' needs and thereby increase your course registration rates. Take a minute and view the online Web site at Minot State University (http://online.misu.nodak.edu).

Questions to Answer Prior to Designing for Online Learning

- Who am I trying to reach?
- What is the purpose of my site?
- What is my online theme for this site?
- What impressions am I creating?
- Is the site for online or on-campus?
- What kinds of browsers are most often used by these people?
- What are my resources?
- Importance of Web accessibility?
- Section 508 of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act?
- What links do I need for online education?
- What possible Web sites can I use as models?
- Have I gotten permission to link to other sites? To use logos and/or graphics?
- How can I maintain site freshness?
- How can my site grow?

Online Web Organization and Style

An online Web site with good content will be unsuccessful if the information targeted for your online students is disorganized. Organization of content should provide a logical mental map for the online students and faculty members to follow. Experienced Web designers begin by sketching out on paper how the Web site will look. The result is an online storyboard of how the pages will be connected. Each page on the storyboard is then diagramed to determine the most effect layout for the information to service online students. General online Web design guidelines include the following:

- Put the most important information near the top of the document.
- Write clear, concise text.
- Use graphics only if they are justified.
- Plan for quick scanning by viewers.
- Limit the amount of information on each page.
- Include easy-to-follow navigation.
- Avoid annoying elements.
- Plan for interactivity.
- Include a feedback method.

Promoting Your Online Web Site

You must market your online course Web site just as you market your university, even though your methods of promotion may be different. Assuming that your online WebCT or Blackboard site has a good mix of content, graphics, and consumer appeal, your next job is to focus on getting the word out to the world. Here are some promotional things that you should do.

Get your school's online Web site on as many search engines as possible. A search engine is a gigantic cyberspace Yellow Pages covering the entire world. There are a dozen or so major search engines–such as Yahoo!, Google, and Alta Vista—and more than 1,500 more specific ones that cover everything from art to yams. Surfers use a search engine to find your online course delivery Web site by entering a keyword, which the engine uses to browse the world in search of matching links.

Some search engines view the contents of your online site, and others look for more specific technical areas in your school site (meta tags) that are used to identify who you are and what you do. In addition to multiple search engine listings—it is recommended that you list with at least 150 search engines—you will need to include adequate keywords to allow the surfer to find your school's online programs and classes.

Marketing Your Online Program via E-mail

Newbies to online programs via the Internet may think that e-mail is a great way to promote a Web site or your university's online programs. After all, it is just like direct mail, right? Wrong! E-mail is a good marketing tool, but you cannot use it like you would direct mail. In Net terms that is called "spamming," and you can be blacklisted from the Internet if you spam. Many advertisers have tried and suffered the consequences.

However, if visitors to your Web site sign a guest book, you can send them as much information as you like without it being considered spam. After all, they have actively engaged you at your Web site, and you are merely reciprocating. Some Web gurus are calling this "push technology." Northwest Airlines does a great job with push technology.

Once you have attracted a visitor to your Web site, the trick becomes getting them to sign in with their e-mail address. You have got to make it worthwhile by offering a free gift, running a contest, or promising to provide additional information on the online classes offered in your school Web site. About 50 percent of your traffic is going to come from search engines, and the other half will come from your student body. Yes! It may take months, but your Web site will become successful.

Conclusion

Successful online program Web site development and promotion require a skillful integration of content, design, and promotion. For the Web publisher promoting online courses, this means taking a careful look at design choices and making selections that are compatible with the target audience based on the information at hand. It requires time and practice to develop and test Web sites that deliver e-learning until the right mix is found, but the extra investment pays off if the site accomplishes its intended purpose and goals. The Higher Learning Commission embraces many various organizations that are delivering online programs and courses. This discussion engages a future need for most schools.

What kind of Web site is needed to recruit and retain students in online learning programs? The following are keys to your successful Web site:

- Establish your identity.
- Find the right online home.
- Build an attractive storefront.
- Let students know they can trust you.
- Make it easy for students to pay you.
- Let the world know about your site.

Clearly, building the elements of a successful online course Web site is a big job, but it is too important to ignore if you want your online classes to grow and thrive.

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Part 1
Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 3
Quality Improvement in Higher Education

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

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Lessons for Higher Education Planning: Applying the Baldrige Criteria

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The University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout) is one of the thirteen publicly supported universities in the University of Wisconsin System (153,000 students on eleven comprehensive campuses plus UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee). The UW System designates UW-Stout as a special mission institution, forged from the heritage of its founder, Senator James Huff Stout, a Wisconsin industrialist. Stout believed that people needed advanced education to prepare them for America's developing industrial society. To implement this vision, he founded a private institution called the Stout Manual Training School in 1891. In 1911, the training school became a public institution named Stout Institute, and it received teacher-training accreditation in 1928 with programs centered on industrial arts and home economics. In 1932, Stout was accredited as a college; it received master's degree accreditation in 1948. The campus became Stout State College in 1955 and Stout State University in 1964. In 1971, UW-Stout became part of the UW System when a State of Wisconsin law combined its two public university systems under one Board of Regents. Now, 110 years since it was founded, UW-Stout's students attend one of three colleges: College of Human Development; College of Technology, Engineering and Management; or College of Arts and Sciences. UW-Stout offers a distinctive array of twenty-seven undergraduate and sixteen graduate degree programs which, taken as a whole, are unique in the country.

UW-Stout has had a long history of quality improvement initiatives and in 1999 began using the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence as the basis for self-assessment and improvement. In 2001, UW-Stout became the first postsecondary institution to win the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The Baldrige criteria are divided into seven categories: leadership; strategic planning; student, stakeholder, and market focus; information and analysis; faculty and staff focus; process management; and organizational performance results. This paper summarizes UW-Stout's efforts in each of the categories, and then outlines the application process.

Leadership

On paper, UW-Stout's organization is a set of typical, hierarchical university functions. Led by Chancellor Charles W. Sorensen, UW-Stout is responsible for meeting the goals set by the Board of Regents; running the day-to-day academic, operational, and planning functions; interfacing with the community and other stakeholders; and managing the support services and administrative staff. A dean leads each college, with department heads and faculty managing academic objectives. Chapter 36 of the General Statutes of Wisconsin requires the formation of additional decision making functions called "shared governance" within the faculty, academic staff, and students. This means that, in addition to the chancellor, these functions have primary responsibility for the formation, development, and review of policies concerning their areas. "Primary responsibility" means "formal power to initiate action, carry out review, and make recommendations which result in legislation" regarding their institution's "academic and educational activities and faculty personnel matters." UW-Stout has three governance bodies: (1) Faculty Senate, (2) Senate of Academic Staff, and (3) Stout Student Association. The concept of shared governance provides for equal representation in the decision making process, but complicates the organizational structure and inhibits rapid decision making. Recognizing these issues, UW-Stout created an innovative leadership system in 1996.

This leadership system removes the organizational complications and inhibitors, encourages responsive two-way communication, and flattens the organization structure through broad involvement of all governance bodies. The Chancellor's Advisory Council (CAC) is the core of the leadership system. It meets biweekly, and involves nineteen university leaders from administration, faculty, support services, Stout Student Association, and the Stout Foundation. These members of the Senior Leadership Team act as the communication conduit to and from their organizations, resulting in strong communication linkages, participatory decision making to achieve consensus, and enhanced opportunity for meaningful faculty and staff roles in shared governance matters. Supporting the CAC are a number of established committees such as the Strategic Planning Committee, the Learning and Information Technology Council, the Planning and Review Committee, and the Curriculum and Instruction Committee. These established committees contain cross-functional and/or cross-college participation, and will typically report to one of the CAC members. The committees also offer additional avenues for the CAC to deploy university-wide actions, analyze issues, and provide results and feedback to the CAC. Many of UW-Stout's core processes emulate the CAC in extent of involvement and participation, with the goal of gaining broad consensus and buy-in to policies, priorities, and actions.

Strategic Planning

Guided by its vision, values, and mission, UW-Stout's objective is to be the school of choice for the twenty-first century. To achieve this objective, campus direction is guided by seven strategic goals with specific action plans deployed through its annual budget planning process involving the entire campus. This process enables UW-Stout to respond to its strategic challenges with constancy of purpose and consistency of actions, avoiding yearly major shifts in direction. UW-Stout's strategic goals are to

- **Offer high quality, challenging academic programs that influence and respond to a changing society.** UW-Stout's challenge is to keep its programs continually renewed and refreshed. Strong stakeholder contact processes are employed to keep current on changing requirements. These relationship processes are complemented by program directors who use an effective program development process to refine existing programs and design new ones that cut across the three colleges and strengthen UW-Stout's mission. Key indicators of success include (1) curriculum renewal, (2) employer assessment of graduate readiness and job performance, and (3) increased level of academic challenge.
- **Preserve and enhance our educational processes through the application of active learning principles.** Hands-on, minds-on student learning capabilities have differentiated UW-Stout in the marketplace as demonstrated by its superior job placement success. The challenge in maintaining this reputation is to continue to lead in the percentage of instruction provided in laboratories and to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities through cooperative relationships with industry. Key success indicators include (1) increased level of student engagement (collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty, and enriching experiences); (2) targeted computer competencies for students; and (3) job placement success.
- **Promote excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, and service.** The campus promotes and facilitates research and developmental opportunities to attract, retain, and develop UW-Stout's faculty and staff. Even though UW-Stout is primarily a teaching university, its objective is to be a leader among the UW System comprehensives in federal grants and in budget allocated for professional development. Key indicators of success include (1) faculty engaged in research grants, (2) professional development expenditures, (3) number of sabbaticals and professorships, and (4) distance education offering growth.
- **Recruit and retain a diverse university population.** To support the increasing requirement for students to operate effectively in a globally diverse environment, UW-Stout deploys initiatives to retain and graduate all student groups, has strengthened multicultural student services, and implements specialized academic support programs and new culture-specific courses. New study abroad programs and additional foreign language requirements for graduation are also being implemented. Key success indicators include (1) recruitment of minority faculty and staff, (2) freshman retention rate, (3) graduation success, and (4) scholarship growth for diversity recruiting and academic quality.
- **Foster a collegial, trusting, and tolerant environment.** The challenge in achieving this goal is to make shared governance effective by integrating the Faculty Senate, the Senate of Academic Staff, and the Stout Student Association (SSA) in planning and decision-making processes. Success indicators include (1) faculty/staff morale, (2) employee turnover, and (3) student retention and satisfaction.
- **Provide safe, accessible, effective, efficient, and inviting physical facilities.** UW-Stout implements effective capital and budget planning processes and innovative methods of funding new technology plans to continually improve its physical facilities in an environment of constant budgetary challenges. This commitment to up-to-date, safe facilities and services has enabled UW-Stout to achieve leadership in student morale in national surveys. The Stout Foundation leads universities its size in fund-raising, and strong industry partnerships provide additional sources for state-of-the-art laboratory technology. Key success indicators are

(1) student satisfaction with the college environment, (2) safety and security, and (3) Stout Foundation financial growth.

◇ **Provide responsive, efficient, and cost-effective programs and services.** UW-Stout must continuously improve and refine internal capabilities to (1) strengthen its attraction as a leading academic institution, (2) optimize its support programs and services to best meet the needs of its students and stakeholders, and (3) ensure that budget priorities are allocated to instruction. In order to achieve this goal, UW-Stout systematically evaluates its support process effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction. Key success indicators include (1) percent of budget allocated to instruction, (2) student evaluation of support programs and services, and (3) energy use.

Student, Stakeholder, and Market Focus

Competition for students comes from other UW System universities, public universities and colleges in the State of Minnesota (because of reciprocity agreements), and other national and international private and public universities. Business and industry are also competitors for high school and technical college students. Since our primary market is Wisconsin, the other UW System campuses are the major competition. Twenty-eight percent of students are nonresidents and come to UW-Stout because of its unique mission and curriculum. UW-Stout's outreach initiatives with high schools, businesses, alumni, and Friends of Stout are effective methods to compete for students. Competitive differentiators for students include UW-Stout's specialized mission, career focus, placement rates, and student services.

UW-Stout's 7,975 students (7,271 undergraduates and 704 graduate students) come from diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnic origins. For over a decade, enrollment has been managed to this approximate level to keep budgets in balance with infrastructure support, laboratories, and faculty-student workload ratio. Seventy-two percent of students are Wisconsin residents, 26 percent come from twenty-four other states, and 2 percent are international students from thirty-four different nations. UW-Stout has a strong student gender balance with 50 percent male and 50 percent female students. Student segments include new students, academically at-risk students, transfer students, graduate students, adult students, minority students, disabled students, and international students. Special services and programs are designed and offered to each of these student groups. Through surveys, UW-Stout identifies the importance of individual requirements on a student's overall learning experience. Surveys are initiated with students at selected times during their academic career and with graduates who provide UW-Stout with data to prioritize and target improvements for student groups, academic processes, and student services.

UW-Stout has five key stakeholder relationships: two academic relationships (UW System/Board of Regents and feeder schools) and three stakeholder relationships (employers, alumni, and the community). Surveys, committees, forums, and line-of-site organizational contacts build and strengthen these relationships and identify important requirements.

◇ **UW System and the Board of Regents.** The UW System, through the Board of Regents, provides UW-Stout (and the other UW System campuses) with uniform policy guidelines and centralized support for mission; capital planning and budget, finance, and trust funds; government liaison services; legal services; purchasing contracts; transfer student information services; and UW System-wide information technology coordination. The UW-Stout chancellor meets twice each month with the UW System president and other chancellors to exchange information and engage in system-wide planning. Other UW-Stout administrators and governance leaders meet regularly with UW System peers to discuss issues and opportunities and to share best practices. UW-Stout participates in UW System-wide institutional research studies and comparative surveys for benchmarking opportunities and to determine goal setting.

◇ **Feeder schools.** UW-Stout has systematic enrollment processes supporting its mission and James Huff Stout's vision. The university has built relationships with high schools, technical colleges, and community colleges with articulation agreements governing transfer courses, sequencing, and career-tracking. As indicators of success of these relationships, UW-Stout prides itself on its ability to attract, retain, and graduate transfer students and provide student services and academic guidance to enable all students to have an equal chance of obtaining a degree.

◇ **Employers.** Five hundred companies recruit UW-Stout graduates, and four hundred companies recruit co-op/intern students. UW-Stout has formal processes and innovative initiatives to maintain constant contact and strengthen employer relationships. Program directors use advisory committees, which include internal and external members, to advise on new program development and implementation. The UW-Stout Technology Transfer Institute (STTI), through its Incubator Program, enables companies with innovative ideas or problems to collaborate with UW-Stout faculty and students to take ideas from concept phase to the production of products and/or services.

◇ **Alumni.** In 1962, UW-Stout created the Stout Foundation for the purpose of raising alternative sources of revenue to expand academic programs, fund new initiatives, and increase scholarships and endowments. The Stout Foundation received the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) Circle of Excellence in Educational Fundraising Award for two consecutive years by (1) building effective relationships with alumni and Friends of Stout and (2) strengthening and building new relationships with industry.

Information and Analysis

UW-Stout's mission, values, and strategies provide a platform for selecting, analyzing, evaluating, and managing data and information to support market, student, and stakeholder needs. These data and information are used to plan strategies and budgets, review and compare process performance, set goals, anticipate changing conditions, and identify root-cause issues and opportunities. Applying its mission, values, and stakeholder needs as a foundation for developing strategic goals and annual plans, UW-Stout has a four-step process to select, align, use, and improve its organizational performance measurement system. These steps include: (1) select key indicators that align to both strategic and annual progress; (2) identify goals based on comparisons and best practices; (3) assure data integrity; and (4) evaluate the effectiveness of indicators in identifying cause and effect.

UW-Stout's approach to data gathering is to enter data one time, one place. To achieve this, we use the concept of data ownership. Data and information requirements identified as part of the strategic planning process are organized into three primary operational areas: (1) academic student data are gathered from faculty and staff in the three colleges and consolidated in the Academic and Student Affairs Division (ASA); (2) business, human resource, safety, and equal opportunity data are gathered from student and support service areas and integrated in the Administrative and Student Life Services (ASLS) area; and (3) information technology operational information (data and information performance) is collected and integrated by the chief information officer (CIO). Further, Budget Planning and Analysis (BPA) collects and integrates operational results to determine short-term performance, and results of studies, surveys, and special reports for use in longer-term planning. BPA analyzes and correlates these data sources to determine operational areas for improvement and strategic trends. UW-Stout uses an integrated relational database (DATATEL ERP system) to consolidate and retrieve university-wide academic and administrative operational and strategic information. As a premier account, UW-Stout is a leader in DATATEL deployment within the education industry. Key operational data are also consolidated in the Factbook. Critical information integrated at the ASA, ASLS, and CIO level is further incorporated for organization-wide short-term decision making at the CAC and actions deployed through the various councils, committees, and governance organizations. Longer-term BPA analysis is integrated during strategic reviews and CAC summer retreats.

UW-Stout selects comparative data based on the following criteria:

1. best appropriate non-educational or educational organization comparisons establish national leadership goals and performance levels for strategic indicators;
2. UW System, mission-similar universities (Ferris State College, Michigan; California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo and Pomona, California; and New Jersey Institute of Technology) and other nationally known higher-education institutions establish national best higher-education practice and stretch goals for process improvement;
3. UW System comparisons and best practices establish leadership in our primary market.

Identification of needs and selection of comparative information surface through strategic planning, Board of Regent initiatives, planning and review by leadership councils and senates, or committees and teams addressing day-to-day process improvements. Comparative data needs are routinely identified as part of the regular program and unit review processes requiring comparisons with peer and competitor institutions and against national, state, and peer best practices. UW-Stout process improvement actions and/or performance review results also highlight comparative information needs, and The Higher Learning Commission and other accreditation reviews require program-focused comparative data.

UW System developed comparative data complement and extend it's own processes for obtaining comparative and benchmark data. UW-Stout employs national standards and reports such as the Common Data Set and NCES data, IPEDS data, and information developed by national organizations such as CUPA and NACUBO. The university participates in national normative surveys such as ACT Student Opinion Survey, NSSE Survey, and ACT Alumni Outcomes. Benchmarking efforts for public comprehensive institutions sponsored by AASCU and EBI are also utilized.

Performing benchmark and comparative studies and using the results for improvement is a widespread activity throughout all university units. When BPA identifies comparative results indicating that improvement opportunities exist, the CAC, ASA, and/or ASLS division ensure the effectiveness of benchmarks by deploying the results through process improvement action plans, meetings, and reports. Councils, committees, and the colleges use comparative and benchmark results to identify improvement areas and implement process refinements. Individual and cross-organization units also perform their own benchmark analysis or participate in peer-group studies to identify improvement opportunities or to justify proposals for new methods of operation. Best practice information is also communicated through membership in professional organizations.

Faculty and Staff Focus

UW-Stout has 1208 employees, including 44 administrative appointments, 277 faculty, 298 instructional and non-instructional academic staff, 388 classified employees, 134 limited-term and project employees (LTEs), and 67 graduate assistants. Classified employees are represented by one of five unions; 54 percent of all employees are female, and 4.4 percent are minorities. Approximately one-third of the faculty are female. UW-Stout has a positive relationship of involvement and interacts with these unions through monthly union-management meetings facilitated by the Human Resources Office.

UW-Stout's organization is a traditional departmental structure within three academic colleges, student service units, and academic and administrative support units. Each position has a clearly defined job description, and each work unit has an established mission, goals, and objectives, which are integrated with UW-Stout's mission and strategic plan. To make this traditional structure effective in achieving student needs and to achieve a high degree of collaboration and flexibility, UW-Stout's work system integrates the departments through a set of campus-wide committees and other cross-functional structures at all levels of the organization.

UW-Stout's work system structures are continually evaluated by the CAC to determine their effectiveness in accomplishing short-term plans and long-term strategies. Opportunities surface from bottom-up organizational analysis of needs or from external factors such as sharing best practices between UW System campuses, proposed changes in legislation or Board of Regents policies, or learning about new approaches in professional societies or seminars. Through discussion and analysis of strategic plans, faculty and staff needs, and budgets, the CAC identifies potential opportunities or required changes to the work system and implements new approaches through ad hoc or standing committees. The Educational Support Unit Review Committee (ESURC) also provides formal feedback to the HR Office on its practices. In spring 2000, as part of ongoing organizational assessments, the ESURC conducted surveys of unit leaders and new and retired employees to determine the level of user satisfaction with HR and to obtain improvement.

UW-Stout employs a number of proactive methods to encourage faculty and staff to develop their full potential. The primary mechanisms are the identification of training and developmental needs through a performance evaluation system and by encouraging grants and research, sabbaticals, fellowships, and professorships. Once training and development needs are discussed and mutually agreed upon during the performance evaluation, supervisors have a number of options to support developmental needs. Tuition reimbursement programs are available to both academic and classified staff. Paid professional development and training opportunities are provided to employees at all levels of the organization. The university supports membership fees in a number of professional organizations so that employees can enjoy the benefits of networking, publications, and training provided by these groups.

Process Management

UW-Stout offers a focused set of twenty-seven undergraduate and sixteen graduate degree programs that are closely aligned to its mission. Within the UW System, more than half of these degree programs are offered only at UW-Stout. The campus is unique in its approach to program development. As stakeholder demands or new opportunities surface through the planning process, UW-Stout will develop and implement new degree programs. Over the past five years, the university has launched degree programs in telecommunications, graphic communications management, technical communication, applied science, mental health counseling, and school psychology. A comprehensive needs assessment is conducted to determine the need for and competencies to be included in each program.

UW-Stout is also unique in its approach to program management. Program directors, who are faculty members reporting to one of the college deans, lead new program development across all three colleges. These individuals are supported by the Planning and Review Committee to ensure that newly developed program proposals are consistent with the mission and that they strengthen each college's curriculum. This focused set of programs guides students in their career choices and enhances their job opportunities upon graduation. The campus Planning and Review Committee also systematically reviews each program on a regular basis. In the review process, input is obtained from all stakeholders in the program. UW-Stout's program development process of identifying new programs and refining existing programs was cited as a best practice in an American Productivity and Quality Center benchmark.

Education support services are designed and delivered to enhance UW-Stout academic programs and to facilitate active learning, student success, and student and stakeholder satisfaction. UW-Stout has four key student services: (1) enrollment services, (2) placement, (3) library, and (4) student life services. Support services for all students, faculty, and staff include budget planning and analysis, physical plant, university services, and information technology. Each of these support services is systematically reviewed on a regular basis by the campus Educational Support Unit Review Committee. This committee was modeled after the campus Planning and Review Committee, and its review process is based on input from all individuals and departments who utilized the service under review.

Organizational Performance Results

The application requires that the institution provide performance results in five areas: student learning, student and stakeholder satisfaction, budgetary and financial performance, faculty and staff performance, and overall organizational effectiveness. In the areas of student learning, UW-Stout provided information on scores on discipline-specific examinations, student computer competencies, and results from the National Survey of Student Engagement as well as overall retention, graduation, and placement rates. In the area of student and stakeholder satisfaction, results of the ACT Student Opinion Survey and ACT Alumni Outcomes Survey were presented as well as survey results from UW-Stout graduate employer surveys, community surveys, and Board of Regent surveys.

In the area of budgetary and financial results, UW-Stout provided tuition rates, revenue growth, and changes in budget allocations. The faculty and staff results section included data on employee morale, diversity, turnover, safety, and professional development. Finally, the organizational results section included information on enrollment, program array, lab-based instruction, student assessments of various support services, and trends in facilities and energy use. Throughout the results category, the data were segmented by student or employee type. Trend data, comparative data, and best-in-class data were presented along with current UW-Stout data whenever the data were available and appropriate.

The Application Process

UW-Stout submitted its first application for the Baldrige Award in 1999. A small group of senior leaders wrote the application with the assistance of a consultant, describing how the institution was addressing the criteria in each category and providing related performance data. The application reached the consensus stage of the review process; however the application did not move forward to the site visit stage. A feedback report was received and was shared widely with the campus. The report validated numerous strengths throughout the categories and outlined several opportunities for improvement, particularly in the availability and use of comparative and best-in-class data. The campus worked on several areas that the examiners had identified as opportunities for improvement. The campus also continued to refine strategies and processes, identify appropriate progress indicators, collect trend data, and locate appropriate sources of comparative and best-in-class data. In 2000, a second application was submitted. This application resulted in a four-day site visit by a team of Baldrige examiners in the fall of 2000. The examiners interviewed several individuals and groups in an effort to verify and clarify all of the information in the application. UW-Stout was the only educational institution to receive a site visit in 2000. Again, a feedback report was provided, and the campus followed up on the recommendations included in the report. A third application was submitted in spring 2001, and a site visit followed in the fall of that year. In late November, the Secretary of Commerce notified the chancellor that UW-Stout had been selected to receive the Baldrige Award.

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Navigating the Quality Award Process in Postsecondary Education

Nancy Cooley
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In a rapidly-changing environment, higher education leaders around the globe are converging on the issue of quality and how it can be measured and improved (e.g., Beanland 2001; Janosik, Creamer, and Alexander 2001.) Policy makers expect colleges and universities to better define what they do and what they have accomplished with the dollars they have received. Key stakeholders, increasingly dissatisfied with anecdotal evidence, are demanding to see data on higher education efficiency and effectiveness. The Australian government recently established the Australian Universities Quality Agency to promote quality outcomes at the institutional level, leading to system improvement and quality enhancement (Beanland 2001), and the U.S.-based Higher Learning Commission launched the Academic Quality Improvement Project "to design an innovative, more challenging alternative process for reaccreditation" (The Higher Learning Commission 2001).

In 1989 the prestigious National Baldrige Award for Excellence was established to recognize and reward businesses for success in the quality improvement process, and in 1998 the Baldrige Award was adapted for educational institutions. However, as noted by Drushal (2001), "even after a decade of dialogue on assessment of learning outcomes, there are relatively few capable and committed campus leaders to document institutional efforts that will encourage and appropriately reward higher levels of productivity" (p. 65.) Between 1995 and 2000, only twenty-one U.S. colleges and universities had received a state-level quality award, and in 2001 the University of Wisconsin-Stout became the first and only postsecondary institution to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. In 2001 the College of Education and Human Services at Ferris State University (FSU) became the first and only public university in Michigan to receive a state-level quality award.

This paper describes the quality award process undertaken by the College of Education and Human Services that led to a site visit from the Michigan Quality Council and receipt of the Navigator Recognition from that organization in November 2001. By documenting the quality award process employed by one institution, the authors hope to provide a road map that will help other postsecondary institutions undertake their own performance improvement initiatives and navigate the quality award process. The paper concludes with lessons learned by FSU, political realities encountered by other institutions, and advice for higher education leaders who are considering or embarking upon a quality improvement initiative.

The Quality Award Process

The Michigan Quality Council is an organization established to promote quality improvement initiatives in business, health care, and education. To compete for one of the four levels of the Michigan Quality Leadership Award (Lighthouse, Navigator, Honor Roll, and Michigan Quality Leadership Award), institutions must complete a rigorous self-assessment and application, and a few institutions are selected to receive a site visit from a team of examiners. Awards are presented annually to recognize Michigan organizations and institutions that have demonstrated performance excellence, and award recipients are expected to share information about their successful quality initiatives.

For FSU, earning Navigator Recognition was the culmination of a process that began in 1998, when Dean Cooley established a college-level leadership team and a strategic planning process that led to a new mission and vision.

In 1999 the college created its first Balanced Scorecard to demonstrate how effectively it was implementing and deploying its mission and vision. The Balanced Scorecard addressed four key questions:

1. To achieve our vision, how do we appear to our customers?
2. To satisfy our students and other stakeholders, at what internal processes must we excel?
3. To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?
4. To be successful, how do we manage and allocate our financial resources?

The leadership team then identified nineteen performance measures–four to six measures per question. Next, the team assembled the relevant data, most of which was available from other campus offices, and analyzed the data to answer the four questions. As a result of this activity, and triggered by a campus presentation from a member of the Michigan Quality Council, the leadership team decided to apply for the Michigan Quality Council Leadership Award. The quality initiative was incorporated into the college's fiscal year 2000 and 2001 goals.

Surveys and preliminary documents were developed by two faculty members in the college, Katherine Manley and Connie Morcum, who had previous experience and training in the quality award process. Those faculty members interviewed faculty, staff, students, and administrators in the college to draft self-study responses to questions in seven categories–leadership, strategic planning, student and stakeholder focus, information and analysis, faculty and staff focus, educational and support process management, and organizational performance results. Dean Cooley and the college administrative assistant, Eleanor Boyd, finalized the forty-eight-page self-study document. Ms. Boyd invested so much time and energy in the process that she was able to use that assignment to fulfill the final requirements of her master's degree. In May 2001 the FSU College of Education and Human Services submitted the self-study, an application for the award, and an application fee of $3050. Based on a review of these materials, the college was one of three applicants selected for site visits. At the fall all-college meeting, faculty and staff members heard a presentation about the self-study report; each of the college's four departments was provided with a full copy of the self-study; and Dr. Manley met separately with departments to answer any questions they might have as the college began to prepare for the site visit.

During the site visit, a team of trained examiners spent three days on campus studying the exhibits that the college had assembled at their request. During that time, the leadership team made a presentation to the examiners about their quality journey, and the examiners interviewed faculty, staff, and students to "clarify and verify" the contents of the self-study. The positive energy surrounding the site visit came abruptly to an end mid-way through the site visit, on September 11, 2001, when all participants saw news coverage of the attack on the World Trade Center. Somehow the examiners completed their site visit and held a brief exit meeting with the leadership team. Although the examiners were prohibited from disclosing the substance of their recommendation to the FSU leadership team, a few weeks later the college was notified that it would be presented the Navigator Recognition at the 2001 Michigan Quality Awards Banquet.

Members of the leadership team attended an elegant black-tie dinner at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel (a past recipient of the Baldrige Award), and the local and state newspaper coverage of the recognition provided high visibility for the college and for Ferris State University. The college subsequently received an extensive feedback report compiled by the team of examiners, which described in detail the college's strengths and areas for improvement. The Michigan Quality Council encouraged the college to address the areas for improvement and apply again for the Baldrige Award in 2002. Although Dean Cooley left Ferris State University to assume a new position in Virginia, the College of Education and Human Services has a detailed action plan for continued quality improvement, and the next dean will have a road map for enhancing the performance of the college.

Lessons Learned

During the quality improvement initiative, the college leadership team learned several important lessons, which became the basis of these recommendations for others.

1. Identify top-level champions of the process. Dean Cooley had the authority and resources necessary to support the quality initiative, and with her departure the faculty and staff intend to screen the dean candidates for their potential to carry the initiative forward.
2. Go public with your intent to improve performance. Public commitments are more difficult to break, and they ensure that the quality initiative remains a high priority even when competing demands threaten to crowd out quality improvement.

3. Make quality improvement a long-term initiative. Build it into formal budget and planning cycles, and periodically share progress in a public forum.

4. Provide organizational direction through the initial strategic planning process. Once a few key goals have been agreed upon, key decisions can be made by testing proposals, policies, and procedures for their ability to support one or more of those goals. The goals statements were matted and framed and were displayed in each office within the college.

5. Pick no more than three performance indicators for each section of the Balanced Scorecard. The college identified four to six indicators to track for each of the four sections—nineteen indicators in all—and the process became unwieldy.

6. Benchmark against comparable but better-performing institutions. The college compared its performance only to other colleges within Ferris State University and missed the learning opportunity that could have come from comparing itself to other high-performing colleges of education and human services.

7. Hire or reassign a project coordinator to prepare the self-study document and the exhibits for the site visit. If the coordinator organizes information by the categories that are the basis of the self-study report, examiners' requests for site visit exhibits can be met more quickly.

8. Communicate internally the goals and the college's progress toward meeting those goals. Many members of the college were surprised to learn of all the quality improvements and performance results other offices had achieved. Circulating the self-study document and walking the members of the college through it greatly enhanced the pride of collective accomplishment for a college that had suffered from low morale only a few years before.

9. Communicate progress and accomplishments externally. Sharing the self-study document with the provost and president of FSU enhanced the credibility of the college with top-level administrators. Sharing information about the site visit and Navigator Recognition with the media relations office at FSU led to positive press at a time when higher education was receiving predominantly negative attention from the media.

10. Take notes during interactions with the site visit examiners. These trained state and national quality examiners helped the FSU leadership team better understand how to organize for results and gave many valuable recommendations that the college began to implement even before the feedback report arrived.

Political Realities and Advice from Other Institutions

Drushal (2001) provides additional insight into political realities encountered by other higher education leaders during the quality improvement process. She offers additional advice for dealing with those political realities to any higher education leader about to embark on the quality journey.

- "This too shall pass" philosophy. Many employees accustomed to short-lived administrative fads are unwilling to waste valuable energy unless leaders thoughtfully justify a quality initiative.

- When one begins to talk about improving quality, people become defensive, and paranoia sets in. Credibility and trust must be earned before the quality initiative begins.

- The hierarchical pyramid lives on in academe. Remove obstacles to creative problem solving by working across areas of responsibility and practicing "servant leadership." Although it can be hard for leaders to hear what's wrong with their leadership or the processes they have established, improvements can't be realized until those problems are acknowledged nondefensively.

- Faculty have difficulty thinking beyond their own departments to the benefits and needs of the larger institution. Developing a shared vision can help reduce campus cynicism about strategic planning and help faculty understand how they can contribute to the overarching goals of the university.

- Faculty and administrators typically believe that data-based decision making is for businesses. However, documenting student improvement without accurate and believable baseline and trend data leaves only a collection of unconvincing anecdotes.

- Change happens accidentally or by design. Choose design.

Drushal also contrasts reengineering and continuous incremental improvement. She quotes Alexander and Serfass (1999), who define reengineering as "starting over," while defining continuous incremental improvement as small steps taken in the agreed-upon direction. In fact, they observe that

> *"Some feel that reengineering is the penalty for lack of continuous improvement"* (p. 30).

Next Steps

Until the FSU College of Education and Human Services hires a new dean, the future of its quality initiative is uncertain. The faculty and staff who are committed to the process do not have the authority to commit the necessary resources, but they will help interview the dean candidates. Once a dean is selected, they will encourage him or her to address the areas of improvement and resubmit an application. As noted in the "lessons learned" section above, it will be critical for them to find a top-level champion for the quality initiative.

In the meantime, Dr. Cooley has been delighted to find a high level of support for quality initiatives in Virginia's postsecondary institutions and particularly at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). The new governor has spoken publicly about the merits of "The Six Sigma" approach to quality improvement. The new Governor's Commission on Efficiency and Effectiveness has been charged with employing twenty-first century management tools like six sigma to make state services more efficient.

In this context, the executive director of SCHEV has advocated an "interest exploration" for that approach—a period of time during which SCHEV will learn more about the approach and discuss whether it makes sense for the agency/higher education to employ it. SCHEV is well positioned for such an initiative based on its record of leadership for quality improvement, such as the 2000 SCHEV spring conference, "Advancing the Quality of Virginia Higher Education," which featured tracks on institutional performance and competency assessments. Clearly, state higher education agencies can serve as catalysts for quality improvement efforts at all levels of postsecondary education by promoting self-assessment statewide, sponsoring conferences and workshops on quality improvement, and modeling continuous quality improvement.

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A Tactical Forum: Extending the Quality Conversation

Bill Ammentorp
David Trites

***fo-rum*: an assembly for the discussion of questions of public interest.**

The AQIP Strategy Forum has proven to be a valuable guide for institutions embarking on the quality journey. However, once an organization has made a commitment to quality, there is an immediate need for *tactical* advice as well as for answers to questions raised by those traveling the journey. This presentation describes a tactical forum created by Minnesota colleges and universities involved in various quality improvement initiatives. This forum–the Minnesota Quality Improvement Project, or MnQIP–holds monthly meetings at which participants share best practices and tactical information. MnQIP has grown out of a collaboration between the Minnesota State College and Universities (MnSCU) and the Leadership Academy of the University of Minnesota. Student dissertation research has shaped the quality journey at many MnSCU campuses, and graduates of the Academy have assumed leadership positions throughout the MnSCU system.

In this paper, we identify several themes that have framed the quality discussion in Minnesota. Since these themes are supported by thesis research, readers have access to a wide literature focused on academic quality improvement. Authors of the cited dissertations are an additional resource for those institutions interested in exploring themes in depth.

The Forum as Learning Community

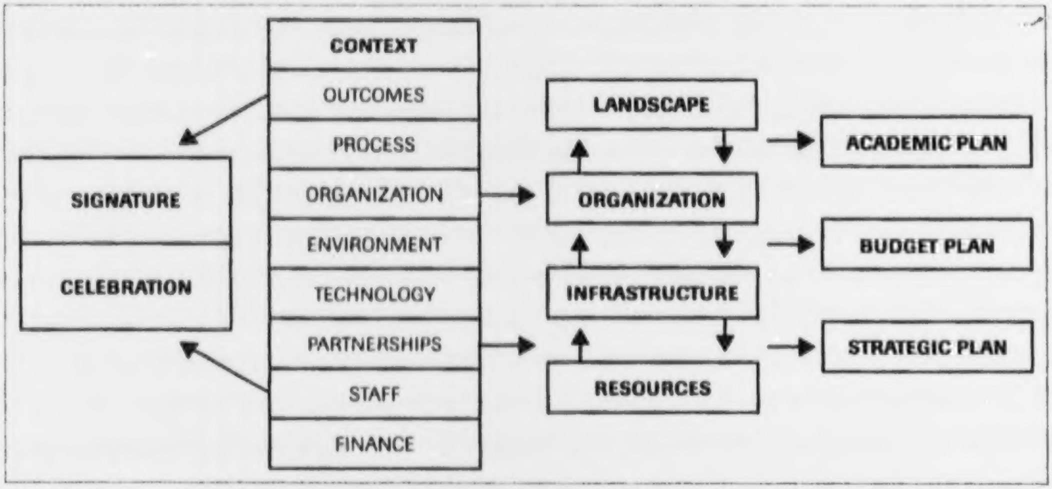
Learning is at the center of all quality initiatives from their earliest conception by Shewart through refinement by Deming and Juran to present day emphases on standards. In the work of The Higher Learning Commission, the focus of the quality initiative is on student learning and on the organizational arrangements that guarantee and improve it. The MnQIP forum is, in effect, a *learning community* in which campus representatives can share ideas and engage in a discussion of issues and practices associated with academic quality improvement. It is an assembly of individuals who are charged with leading similar discussions on MnSCU campuses–forming learning communities at each institution.

As a *learning community*, MnQIP provides members with an opportunity to develop creative approaches to teaching and learning and new systems and structures to support the learning process. Taken together, these developments define an academic paradigm focused on improving the quality of student learning experiences. At MnQIP, this paradigm is one of design, where all members of the campus community focus their discussions and actions on defining a social environment in which the benefits of learning are shared and extended to stakeholders.

The *design paradigm* that has emerged at MnQIP institutions has grown out of the new designs project at the University of Minnesota (Copa and Ammentorp 1998). The *design paradigm* can be pictured as a set of relationships among design elements and their corresponding organizational components, which lead to familiar campus plans.

Figure 1 "tells it all." On the left we see two sets of design elements. The first box contains elements that define organizational culture–the signature or central character of the organization, the celebration or rituals and symbols that communicate the essence of the organization. The second box contains the design elements at the center of the *paradigm*. Campus conversations address issues associated with each of these elements to form a design for learning. As this design is positioned on the educational landscape, it is transformed into an arrangement of organization systems and practices supported by infrastructure and resources. All of the design work is summarized in plans for academic activity, budgets, and organizational strategy.

Figure 1. The Design Process


CONTEXT
OUTCOMES
PROCESS
ORGANIZATION
ENVIRONMENT
TECHNOLOGY
PARTNERSHIPS
STAFF
FINANCE
SIGNATURE
CELEBRATION
LANDSCAPE
ORGANIZATION
INFRASTRUCTURE
RESOURCES
ACADEMIC PLAN
BUDGET PLAN
STRATEGIC PLAN

The *design paradigm* has been widely tested by MnQIP institutions. Academic and strategic plans have been developed to reflect new *designs* for teaching and learning. The experiences taken from these applications of the *design paradigm* have resulted in organizational learning experiences and thesis research that define the following MnQIP themes.

Leading by Design

Design has become a metaphor for a new form of leadership behavior at several MnQIP colleges (Nelson et al. 1999). For example, Lake Superior College has developed an *Academic Design Process* made up of the steps shown in Figure 2 (Nelson & Stenerson 1999).

In Figure 2, *design* is represented by the "boxes" in the center of the page. Each *design* flows from its predecessors so that the final organization design positions the teaching and learning activities of the college on its educational landscape. As the *design paradigm* has evolved at Lake Superior College, it has transformed student learning experiences using a cycle of planning and implementation as shown in Figure 3.

Measuring Academic Quality

All quality initiatives take the position that data-driven decisions are a necessary condition for informed action. These data are derived from various measures of student experience combined with measures of organizational condition and function.

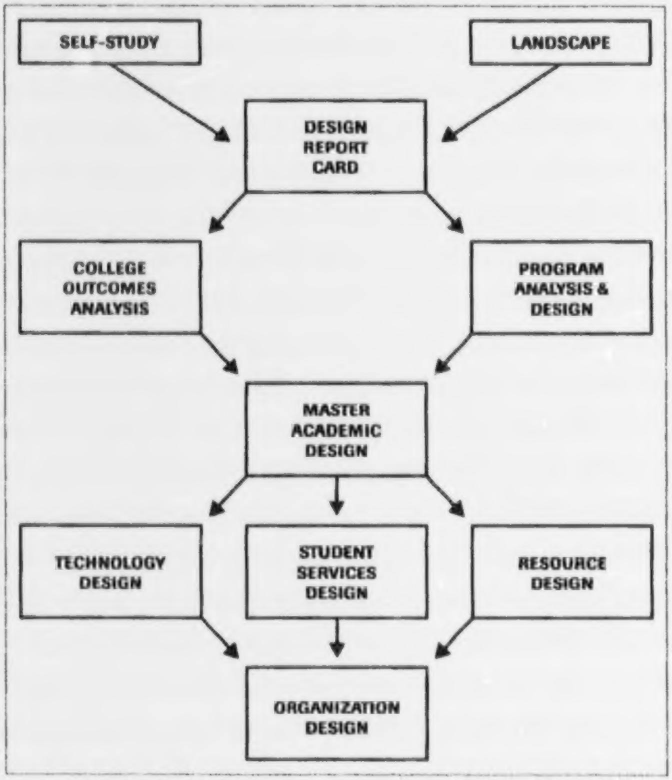
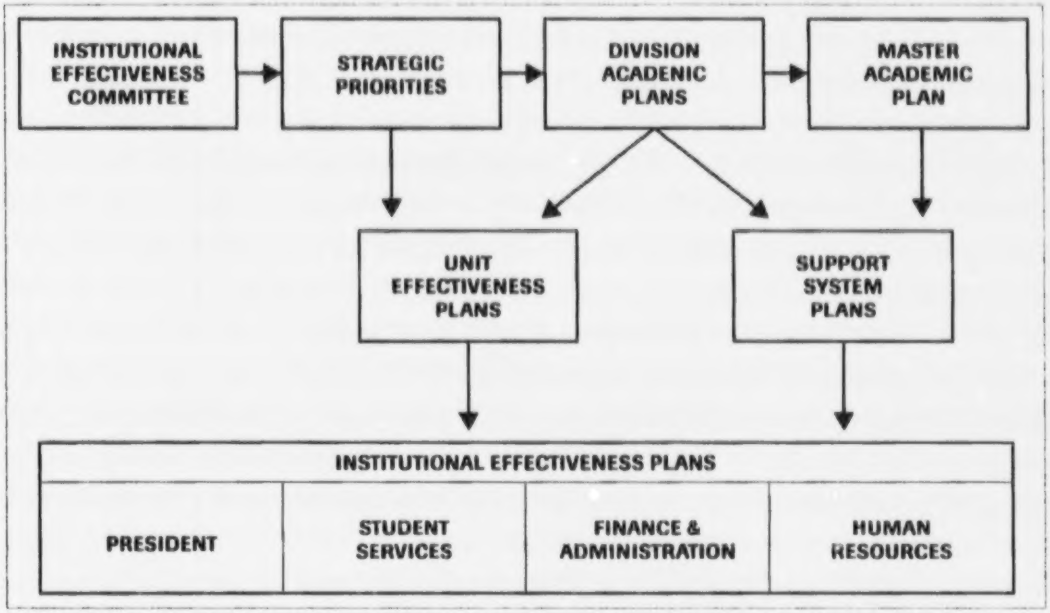

SELF-STUDY
LANDSCAPE
DESIGN REPORT CARD
COLLEGE OUTCOMES ANALYSIS
PROGRAM ANALYSIS & DESIGN
MASTER ACADEMIC DESIGN
TECHNOLOGY DESIGN
STUDENT SERVICES DESIGN
RESOURCE DESIGN
ORGANIZATION DESIGN

Figure 2. The Academic Design Process

Figure 3. Integrating Institutional Plans



Application of these assumptions requires a comprehensive understanding of the requisites, costs, and uses of information. MnQIP members have framed the discussion of measuring academic quality along the lines suggested by the following questions.

1. What are the essential variables to be measured in the quality improvement process?
2. What measurement strategies are best suited for application in a collegiate setting?
3. How can the resulting data be integrated and presented for use by members of the college community?

Closing the Feedback Loop

At Winona State University (WSU), planning is a continuous process rather than an episodic one. Academic, operational, and budgetary plans are mutable products of collaborative, principle-centered decision making, open to discussion and revision as circumstances change. Two factors make this possible. First, because significant effort has been invested into developing a sophisticated assessment system and a culture of continuous improvement, the campus community has rapid access to useful information and a collective willingness to consider change. Second, the university's various student, faculty, staff, and administrative constituent groups have an ongoing commitment to open participation in the planning process. In practice, many plans are initiated by administration, but a well-informed plan to advance the university may originate at any level and within any constituent group, and may be brought through open discussion to the entire community (Hatfield & Yackey 2000).

Types of Assessment Data

For over a decade, WSU has made a practice of distributing a data book to all constituent groups on campus annually, and making it available to any individual who wants a personal copy. The data book contains detailed budgetary spreadsheets, summary analysis and trend line graphs on a large number of student satisfaction measures, credit-hour production and grade profiles by department and college, and a range of enrollment statistics. The administration distributes additional data summaries and spreadsheets—either on its own initiative or at the request of constituent groups—on a continuous basis. With the advent of the new digital assessment database system, it is now possible to generate customized reports with a fairly simple query tool, further expanding access to information needed for planning. Finally, each unit in the university collects assessment data on a continuous basis for departmental purposes. As needed to address broader questions, these data are also available for planning.

Short-Term Planning

By contract and institutional custom, senior administrators produce an annual report of the previous year's activities and a projection of issues likely to deserve attention in the year ahead within their areas of responsibility. These reports draw heavily on the information in the data book and on budgetary and survey data gathered within each vice-presidential area. In 2000–2001, for example, assessment data strongly indicated student interest in a convenient information service, so academic affairs and student affairs proposed creating a student answer center. Now in its second year, this "one-stop shop" has proven to be highly successful and, incidentally, has become a new, rich source of assessment data. As another example, the vice president for information technology conducts periodic student surveys to gauge satisfaction with the laptop program. These, coupled with service logs from the technical support center, help ongoing planning efforts for the WSU laptop program.

In past years, it was customary to present these reports and subsequent interim reports and suggestions for change through all-university committees, which include representation from all constituent groups, and then to the larger community. During the late 1990s, the pace of change in several key areas accelerated, making it more productive to initiate discussions of short-term issues directly with the constituent groups through the "meet and confer" process. In turn, constituent groups have increasingly found it fruitful to present short-term issues for discussion directly to administration through meet and confer opportunities and through task forces created through meet and confer.

Long-Range Planning

This shift has led to some softening of the roles of standing planning committees, not only the long-range planning committee but also the space committee and the technology committee. These bodies are now freer than in past years to draft long-range policy statements and visionary documents instead of focusing heavily on short-term challenges. A case in point is the major framework document on instructional technology recently released for campus-wide consideration by the all-university technology committee (AUTC). Building on information gathered in surveys by the instructional technology division and institutional research, the AUTC identified major issues in faculty development, network infrastructure, and communication that need to be addressed over the next few years. Even in draft form, the planning document has given administration significant guidance on how to reconfigure training and development functions to produce a new e-learning center for faculty and staff during 2001–2002. The proposal for that center is now under discussion within faculty and staff committees where, again, planning will be informed by feedback from users.

Budgetary Planning

As an example of continuous, collaborative short-term planning, consider the process by which the budget for the current academic year has been developed. As enrollment data and the first projections of the state budget allocation became available in October 2000, the administration shared these data with the student senate and requested its help in preparing a tuition recommendation to MnSCU. When MnSCU later asked the university to help it prepare a request budget for the legislature, WSU administration prepared a response based on programmatic demand data and presented it to faculty and staff constituent groups for refinement. During the spring of 2001, as it became apparent that not only MnSCU's request budget but also its incremental base budget was imperiled, WSU administration again shared all budget and enrollment projections with the constituent group assemblies. The result of multi-lateral discussions was a three-part plan to meet a predicted $2.5 million shortfall through a further tuition increase, staff reductions, and redefinition of the university's enrollment base.

At each step in this continuous process, assessment data were used to identify not only areas that should sustain cuts but also those that deserved protection or expansion as the budget was being reshaped. For example, satisfaction surveys and daily usage statistics confirmed the need for an increased budget for computers in the library—an increase that was built into the tuition plan developed by the student senate. As another example, the nursing program in Rochester was expanded in this year's budget even as other programs were de-emphasized, in part because of detailed analysis of demographic data and surveys of external interest groups.

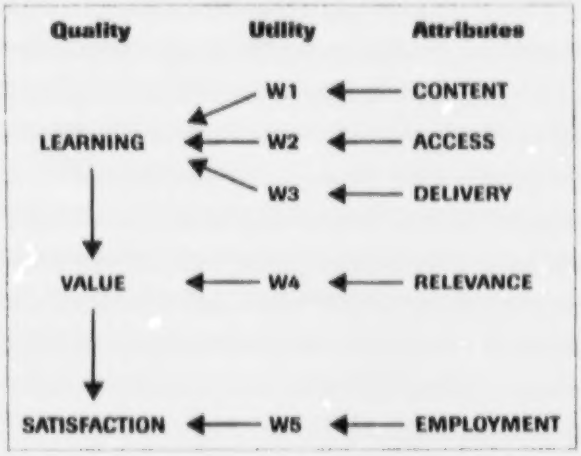
In summary, then, university planning at WSU takes place in several arenas and with the participation of many groups of people. It is never the sole product of administration. In all arenas, planning depends on the ready availability of reliable assessment data. Every attempt is made to triangulate by drawing on multiple sources of data.

Qualitative Perspectives on Quality

Managing the quality initiatives in higher education requires deep understanding of the meaning of quality as seen by educators on the one hand and customers on the other. These meanings are *qualitative* in that they reflect the concepts and relationships people use to describe their experience with products and services. They are also linked one to another in networks of meaning that are shared and refined over time.

In general such networks have a structure like that shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Network of Qualitative Concepts in Higher Learning

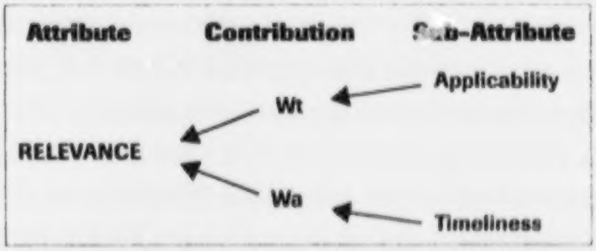


In this network, the attributes of the learning experience (CONTENT, ACCESS, DELIVERY) determine how it is perceived by the customer. Each attribute, in turn, is weighted (W1…W5) as to the customer's perceptions of the attribute's contribution to the utility of the product/service. When combined with the RELEVANCE of the learning experience, we have an estimation of the expected VALUE of the degree or certificate. Finally, by considering the customer's EMPLOYMENT experience, we arrive at perceived satisfaction. Every variable in this network is *qualitative;* they fall outside the traditional tools and practices of quality management.

The trick in applying the logic of Figure 4 involves creating procedures for determining how an attribute can be rated or measured (Swanson 1999). While we may be able to measure "ACCESS" and "EMPLOYMENT" using standard *quantitative* tools and procedures, we are unlikely to be able to measure "content," "delivery," or "relevance" in a similar fashion. Instead, we must turn to *qualitative* measures for these attributes.

Consider the attribute "RELEVANCE." Suppose that this attribute is applied to a program offering students technical skills where RELEVANCE refers to "applicability," "timeliness," and other fuzzy variables. Then RELEVANCE is the resultant of yet another network of concepts, like that shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Semantic Network for RELEVANCE of Technical Training Program



Here, each subattribute is weighted according to its contribution to the relevance of skills learned in the training program. We have networks of increasing complexity, all due to the fact that quality is qualitative in nature.

As MnQIP members extend their understanding of quality, they are increasingly aware of the complexity of the concept and the work that needs to be done to measure quality in teaching and learning. By recognizing that quality is both *quantitative* and *qualitative* in nature, educators will not only be better able to manage quality; they will also find ways to connect the quality agenda across the curriculum.

Future Directions for MnQIP

Members have identified several key issues to be addressed in future meetings. These are framed as a series of questions:

- What assessment strategies and practices support continuous quality improvement?
- How can auditing of teaching, learning, and support services be incorporated in quality management?
- How can institutional resources be allocated in support of the quality agenda?

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Becoming a Great College... the Western Way

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Jane Rada
Gail Sherry

Introduction

Western Wisconsin Technical College started its quality journey in 1988 when college leaders researched, investigated, and determined to adopt the continuous quality improvement (CQI) philosophy and concepts of W. Edward Deming. Subsequently, Western's district board adopted a quality improvement policy that has served to guide the college's CQI journey. The college formed a cross-functional Quality Planning Team (QPT) to select a coordinator. The CQI coordinator was responsible for managing and evaluating the quality improvement process. In 1989 Western searched for a new president who was committed to the philosophy and principles of continuous quality improvement. Dr. Lee Rasch was selected and has provided outstanding leadership in the implementation of the CQI program and has focused on the college's CQI efforts on data-based decision making, on students as our primary customers, and on making the transition from a teaching to a learning organization.

Opportunity for Improvement

Western's first quality training program focused on providing participants with a basic understanding of quality principles and philosophy. The training provided an overview of different quality philosophies, helped participants see how quality principles might be used in an educational setting, and underscored the importance of Deming's fourteen points. Presenters used a training module format for the training materials and relied heavily on a lecture format using a plethora of overhead transparencies. Within a five-year time period, 75 percent of faculty and staff at the college had participated in Module I—Introduction to Quality. Participant feedback about the training showed that participants preferred a more active format for the training, a practical application to their own work, and fewer overhead transparencies!

In the spirit of CQI, Western is always looking for new and better ways to improve a system or process by asking "what if?" and "why not?" One of the challenges in deploying a CQI program is to enlighten staff on basic quality principles and to apply that knowledge to their role at the college. According to Clinton O. Longnecker (quoted in Ineffective training 1998), "American corporations spend billions of dollars annually on employee training, but in many cases the training engaged in may fall short" (1998,14).

Thus, in 1999 the CQIC charged a project team with developing, implementing, and evaluating a new quality training program. A project coordinator was selected through a temporary professional development position to develop, implement, and evaluate the new quality training program. Other cross-functional members were recruited, including administrators, faculty, nonteaching professionals, and support staff. The team's charge was to create a quality training program that would enhance employee success and satisfaction and develop a service culture within the organization.

Process Improvements

The project team developed five new training outcomes that provided an introduction to Western's quality culture and environment for new college employees. The five outcomes were to

1. identify strategies to develop a service culture
2. develop an awareness of systems thinking

3. cultivate useful teamwork skills
4. foster trustworthy behavior
5. apply problem-solving processes

With these objectives articulated, the goal would be for employees to build relationships with each other to cultivate a healthy, productive work environment. According to Masie, "All training is about behavioral stimulation that changes human beings on some level" (cited in Salopek 1998, 22–23). This training would also reinforce Western's strategic priority to "enhance employee success and satisfaction." The training activities developed were designed to reflect Western's unique culture, which values "working together in a healthy environment where creativity, humor, and fun are encouraged."

The project team was given an opportunity to pilot the revised training to individuals who had completed at least one of the quality training modules at Western. Fifty potential participants representing all employee categories were identified; twenty-two staff members accepted the invitation to participate in the training session. The revised program created an energized active learning environment incorporating an assortment of instructional methodologies. A variety of staff assist in facilitating the program as shown in the sample agenda.

Becoming a Great College Agenda

7:30–8:00	Coffee, continental breakfast, and conversation
8:00–8:15	Overview
8:15–8:45	Welcome from the President and introductions with quality item
8:45–9:15	System's activity (CQI Specialist)
9:15–9:30	Deming's fourteen points of quality (CQI Specialist)
9:30–9:45	Break
9:45–11:00	Building a service culture (Faculty)
11:00–11:15	My way or the highway (Faculty)
11:15–11:30	Reflections on key learning
11:30–12:15	Lunch
12:15–1:00	Working together (Faculty, Campus Recruiter, and Support Staff)
1:00–1:30	Quality in action at Western (AQIP Coordinator)
1:30–1:45	Break
1:45–2:00	Glue (Vice President)
2:00–2:30	FISH (Department Manager)
2:30–2:45	Final reflections of learning
2:45–3:00	Video recap of the day
3:00–3:15	Checkout/feedback/evaluations

Feedback from the pilot session was used as a basis for implementing the training program with new staff members during the January 2000 training week.

College Investment

One of Western's greatest strengths is its commitment to its greatest asset—its human resources. Because of this and its belief in employee success, the college invested a significant amount of fiscal and human resources to make the revised training project a reality.

The human investment involved the assignment of a staff member to a one-semester professional development position. The development of a new quality training program was part of the job responsibilities associated with the position.

This assignment demonstrated a collaborative effort that benefited both the college and the employee. The employee used the project as an applied learning experience that served as a capstone project for a bachelor's degree; in addition, the college received a new training program.

Taking into consideration the average daily earnings of the employee groups represented, to date 115 staff members have been trained at an approximate cost of $22,000.

Operating expenses for the training program are nominal. For the initial training session, presenters volunteered their time or were granted release time to participate in selected portions of the training activities. Other related costs included meals, refreshments, handouts, and supplies, which usually run approximately $300 per training session.

This commitment to its human resources has been validated externally through Western's participation in the Wisconsin Forward Award process (a state quality award). In 2001 the college was recognized in the first tier of the excellence band for the faculty and staff category, which was an improvement from its 1999 application recognition for that same criterion.

Measurement and Satisfaction

Faculty, staff, and students have benefited from the development of the Becoming a Great College quality training. Six sessions have been conducted over the last three years. Mandatory attendance is required of all new employees. In addition, other employees often attend to refocus and hone their skills.

For faculty and staff, the training reiterates Western's commitment to "working together in a healthy environment where creativity, humor, and fun are encouraged." Refinement of the training activities continues to evolve. Based on feedback from the president and other staff, the August 2000 training session was further revised to integrate the college values and the *Western Way–Do We Get Them, Do We Keep Them, Do They Learn, and Are They Satisfied?*

Since the inception of the training, a five-point Likert scale evaluation (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree) has been used to measure employee satisfaction with the training. For the first three training sessions, evaluation scores on the question, "Would you recommend this training to others?" ranged from 4.4 to 5.0. During the last three sessions the scores have been 5.0.

The quality training serves as a foundational element as the college pursues an organizational management style based on a Baldrige framework. One indicator of the success of the training program has been the receptiveness of department managers and employees to view students, internal employees, and external community partners as customers. This mindset change has been instrumental in the implementation of Western's new service evaluation process. The following steps present a condensed process improvement outline:

1. Identify key customers
2. Identify key customer requirements
3. Identify critical processes for service delivery
4. Identify and review internal data to monitor service effectiveness
5. Identify process to improve
6. Develop an implementation plan
7. Identify performance measure for customer requirements
8. Monitor and revise the process(es)

In spring 2001 Western piloted a nationally-normed student satisfaction survey. This change in surveys hampered the CQIC team's ability to compare student satisfaction scores with those from the previous tool. However, the new tool provided a gap analysis and comparative data. Analysis of the 2001 survey tool indicated that Western's student satisfaction exceeded that of students in the comparison group. Further analysis will occur in spring 2002 when Western will be able to measure its progress on closing the gap scores between student expectations and student satisfaction.

Conclusion

Western has created a quality training program that mirrors the college culture and supports the college's continuous improvement philosophy. The active learning format exemplifies the experiential learning environment Western creates for its students and demonstrates a cross-functional team approach to the educational process. In addition, this format integrates basic quality principles with college values and the *Western Way... Do We Get Them, Do We Keep Them, Do They Learn, and Are They Satisfied?*

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Performance Improvement: Total Quality Improvement in a Research University

Allan M. Hoffman
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Institutional Setting

Des Moines University–Osteopathic Medical Center has integrated a performance improvement model as part of the organizational culture. This system is patterned after The Higher Learning Commission Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) and is a management technique that emphasizes academic quality improvement in educational, research, and clinical activities. The university and each academic unit of the organization have developed performance improvement committees in an effort to create an environment that enhances performance and focuses on student learning as a core organizational value.

Among the key questions addressed as this model developed are how to create an organizational culture that openly discusses and seeks methods to maximize and enhance student outcomes and achievement; methods to create systems that embrace and value the focus on student learning and integration of that value into the research mission of the university. Other issues emphasized in this model are the need to develop organizational documents–bylaws, mission statements, and committee structures, among others–that clearly articulate academic quality improvement as an organizational goal and core value. Creating an open and ongoing dialogue concerning improvement in performance became a crucial ingredient to fully integrating this methodology.

Background

In 2000, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools initiated an Academic Quality Improvement Project known as AQIP. With support of the PEW Charitable Trust, the Academic Quality Improvement Project sought to develop an alternative model of accreditation to help guide academic institutions to focus on a systematic quality improvement model. This model focuses on quality improvement and allows higher education organizations to achieve a high level of performance based on the special characteristics and institutional identity.

The guiding values of the Performance Improvement Model and program as initiated at Des Moines University are based on the AQIP model and are an outgrowth of the total quality improvement model. These values and criteria are mission-focused and holistic. They include the following factors:

- ◇ **Focus.** The mission of the university and vision are clearly focused on student and interested stakeholder expectations. Communications, organizational decision-making, and planning processes and outcomes are goal-driven. The mission focus is the basis for all actions and is designed to enhance both institutional performance and individual and organizational accountability.
- ◇ **Involvement.** Decision making focuses on a cultural value that is both broad-based and inclusive. Participation is encouraged and individual and group ownership are facilitated by maximizing involvement of all university constituents.
- ◇ **Leadership.** The leadership of the colleges and university supports a quality-driven culture. Open dialogue is encouraged, and a structured Performance Improvement Committee has been introduced as a forum for analysis and discussion of both quantitative and qualitative data as they relate to improving student outcomes. Leadership encourages an open and honest dialogue and is included on the committee membership.

- **Valuing people.** The individual–that is, student, faculty, support personnel, management, and external stakeholder–is encouraged and supported and viewed as a valuable resource to and essential in the achievement of outcomes.

The core value of Helping Students Learn is the primary focus of both the model and the university and is the guiding principle of the model. Activities such as research, clinical education, and classroom instruction are the key and guiding principles of this model and all focus on helping to maximize student performance.

Performance Improvement: Student Outcomes Assessment Mission

As noted, Des Moines University is committed to a process of evaluation that leads to institutional improvement and promotes educational quality. The university views assessment not as an end in itself but as a means of gathering information that can be used in evaluating the institution's ability to accomplish its purpose. The performance improvement assessment program provides information that assists the institution's constituents in making useful decisions about improvement and in making plans for sustaining and expanding that improvement.

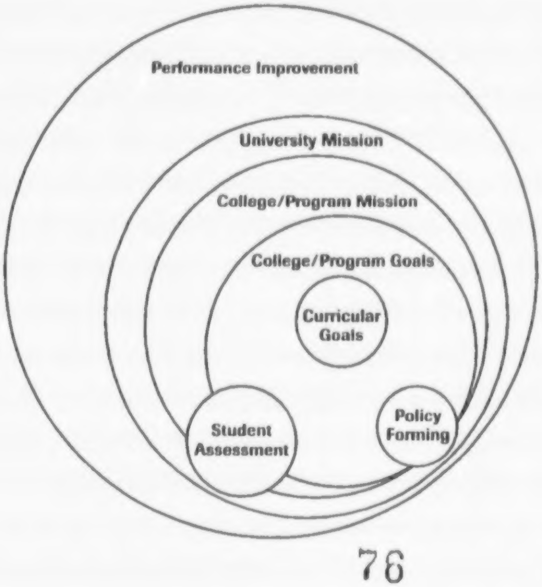
Student Assessment Plan

An overriding objective of this effort is the student assessment plan, which is designed to ensure that assessment activities include all relevant academic system inputs, processes, and outputs. The plan provides the structure necessary to support appropriate feedback, which is used to direct quality and thus performance improvement. The overall objective of the program is to develop a cybernetic system, which is designed to enhance quality related to student performance and achievement through the continuous feedback of key data. Data-driven strategies are used to assess, evaluate, and identify opportunities for improvements.

Linkage of the Plan to the Mission, Goals, and Objectives of the Institution

Each academic program within the university has a mission and goals that relate directly to the overall institutional mission. Curricula are developed to ensure that program mission and goals are met by students who successfully complete a program. The model is competency based. Not only do plans assist in providing direction related to operationalizing the collection of student outcomes data; they also specify how the data collected will be used to ensure continuous program improvement and effectiveness.

The diagram below illustrates how student performance relates to the university mission and each college and program.



The University Plan

The student assessment program was developed and implemented by the faculty and administration of the college. The faculty, in partnership with college management, are ultimately responsible for the operational aspects of the performance improvement program. The faculty are specifically charged with curriculum design, innovations, and implementation. Thus, the faculty in partnership with the administration have designed a committee structure that ensures that they are continuously involved in the evaluation of programs, curricula, and student outcomes.

Detailed below is a diagram of the Performance Improvement Committee.

College of Health Sciences
Performance Improvement Committee

⇕

Admissions Committee
Curriculum Committee
Student Promotion and Evaluation Committee
College Faculty, Students, Support Personnel, and Other Stakeholders

The goals of this structure are:

- To develop processes that evaluate student academic achievement and performance
- To develop department, program, and college plans for assessment that provide feedback used to enhance the quality of university academic and support programs
- To assist the institution in providing data that increase awareness of the consequences and impact of what we do and thereby improve overall performance
- To improve planning and resource allocation
- To provide accurate data information about our academic programs to consumers and stakeholders
- To provide information that can be used in measuring institutional success
- To provide information that promotes continuous performance improvement
- To serve students by accurately indicating what they can expect from their academic programs
- To promote institutional accountability

Note

Allan M. Hoffman served as a member of the Design Team for the Academic Quality Improvement Program of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

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Assessing the Student Experience from College Entry to College Exit as Part of the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP and Baldrige-Driven Self-Study

Jan Donley
Jackie Messersmith

Background

A focus on quality and continuous improvement in higher education means moving away from traditional models of leadership and organization and the "silo" approach to decision making. A more collaborative approach that creates a learning community dedicated to serving students and staff more effectively and building better relationships becomes transformational for the institution (Sallis 1994). To be successful, according to Sallis (1994), quality efforts must attend to the core business of teaching and learning; be heuristic in nature, allowing the institution to learn from the experiences of its people; and have a common purpose and vision among all constituents. Attention must be given to the experiences of the learner along the educational path, including entry and exit experiences.

Leadership has the responsibility to create an opportunity for new models that support continuous learning, and as Deming (1986) has noted, "help people do a better job with less effort." The processes that impact students in the educational path can also impact their success or failure in the achievement of their goals. Helping students make informed choices as they start their college experience and understand the resources needed to achieve success are vital to reaching effective learning outcomes. The institution is instrumental in helping the student define conditions of satisfaction and learning requirements needed for goal attainment. The "silo" approach to decision making limits the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational processes and interferes with a smooth transition for students as they progress through the learning experience. Service quality is addressed by creating an environment that supports the human side of change and addresses people-related issues and processes (Canic and McCarthy 2000).

Quality is a journey, and each institution must find it's own path. For those who have been traveling this path, it is clear that a change in perspective is central. Creative reinvention of management and new ideas about how instruction and services are delivered are part of the commitment to quality (BW Associates 1992). To begin, one must understand the current blueprint of how workflow processes are currently happening and how the existing structure and procedures are impacting the student, the educational path, and the core business of teaching and learning. "Quality must be built into the process by listening to stakeholders," according to John Dew (2000) of the University of Alabama; "collecting data and involving the stakeholders in the improvement of processes, one project at a time."

The Challenge

Making a commitment to participate in the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP reaccreditation process provided an opportunity to draw attention to continuous improvement and begin developing an integrated quality management system. Cincinnati State Technical and Community College has accepted the challenge of working across the organization to improve workflow processes for better service to the college's 7000+ students. The challenge requires new approaches to studying the work, more collaboration between faculty, staff, and leadership, and a willingness to learn how to be more effective as an institution.

Beginning the Journey

Cincinnati State chose to enter the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP model for reaccreditation, which requires a self-study process. This year the college is involved in the state quality award program (the Ohio Award for Excellence, or OAE) as a tool for the self-study. A cross-functional and cross-level study team of nine people was formed to organize the self-study, collect data for the award application, and write the application. The study team began with focus groups of faculty, staff, administration, and students convened around the seven Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence in Education as the topics of discussion about the institution. Feedback was summarized and posted on the Intranet. The study team conducted interviews with administrators around key issues related to the approach and deployment of the Baldrige criteria and related workflow processes. The data were charted and used in writing the award application. An advisory team, consisting of faculty, staff, and administrators, was selected to guide a workflow study on processes affecting the student experience from entry to exit. Plans were already being developed to build a one-stop student services center, and the workflow study was expected to provide information important to improving and streamlining entry processes for students. Work*flow*dynamics was selected as the external business partner to conduct the study.

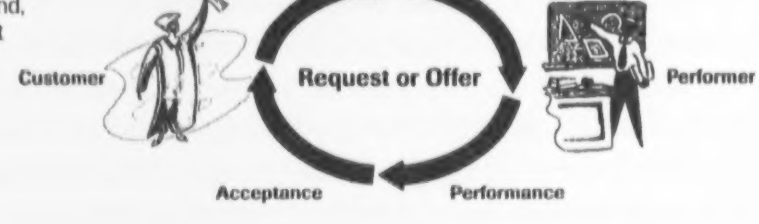
The Procedure

The college's workflow study advisory team met with Work*flow*dynamics to discuss the stages of the study and provide feedback on achieving organizational participation and buy-in. Managers were invited to select the appropriate process participants for the study. Fifty processes were identified for study. The college held a meeting with all process participants in the study to discuss the purpose and procedure for the study. Attention was given to how the study supported the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP reaccreditation self-study efforts and the Ohio Award for Excellence application process. Process participants were asked to identify critical success factors for the study as well as possible barriers or constraints that might impede the study.

In this study, the processes were mapped using participatory design, the Human Interaction Model, also known as the Atom of Work and Conversation for Action, and workflow mapping, also referred to as Coordination Mapping and Action Workflow (Harris and Taylor 1997), which are methods recommended by the Center for Quality of Management. Combined, these methods provide a rigorous, customer-focused framework for the analysis and design of work processes, and are rooted in the idea of design as a social process, rather than a technical process.

Participatory design aims to go beyond technical design to address organizational issues and create a shared understanding and knowledge among the individuals who do the work: the process participants. Process participants are typically the people who interact in the process and are most familiar with how the work actually is done. It's not uncommon for management to believe they know the process but reality is that it does not happen the same way they believe it does. Participatory design explicitly creates opportunities for process participants to come together for collaboration and negotiated decision making as it relates to the current and future state of the process.

The Human Interaction Model illustrates the interactions between a customer and a performer. Customer means the person who makes a request or receives an offer, nothing more. The performer (or supplier or provider) is the person who makes an offer or to whom a request is made. Customers or performers may be inside or outside of the organization. The request or offer needs to articulate the conditions of satisfaction, which often include requirements and deliverables. If the conditions of satisfaction are not clear and, subsequently, expectations are not managed, the wrong work is often performed and the customer will not be satisfied.



In workflow mapping, each interaction is visually represented by a loop (see above). Each coordinating interaction between a customer and a performer moves through four phases: (1) preparation, which leads to the making of a request or offer; (2) negotiation and agreement about the request or offer (or failure to do so); (3) performance of the work requested or offered and determination that the work is complete; and (4) assessment of the work and a declaration of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The interdependencies among interactions are represented by links drawn between the interaction loops, with the triggers indicated by where the link is connected to the loop. As the interactions are mapped for a current process, what works well and not so well is identified and categorized in recognized patterns of strengths and weaknesses.

Phase I *(Insight)* of the study consisted of Work*flow*dynamics personnel meeting over a two-month period with small groups of the process participants—the people designated as having knowledge about the processes under review. Each process was validated in a second meeting of the same group to ensure accuracy in the mapping. Workflow "as-is" blueprints were created and categorized to indicate areas of strength and weakness in each of the fifty processes. Findings were summarized in a report prepared by Work*flow*dynamics. Recommendations for critical process improvement opportunities were summarized. Findings were compared to student satisfaction survey data over a two-year period, along with college materials such as catalogs. Dissemination of the data and findings began with the participant group first. A presentation to management followed. Unit leaders have begun a more detailed look at the study's results for planning and process improvement.

Findings

Process maps were summarized. Strengths and opportunities for improvement were charted. Areas of redundancy, inconsistency, and disconnects in workflow process are undergoing additional study. In one specific process, the student ID card, students have to visit three different departments before being able to validate their ID cards. The study revealed insight into major and minor breakdowns in processes and gaps in meeting customer service needs and requirements.

Improvement Stages

Phase II *(Design)* of the study includes prioritizing opportunities for improvement, assigning process owners, setting target measures, and implementing cost of quality analysis where appropriate.

Process Improvement Opportunities	1 = Lowest 4 = Highest		Total Score	1 = Highest 4 = Lowest
	* Effectiveness	** Feasibility		Priority (Rank)
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	

* Effectiveness: Making this improvement will have a significant impact on the operational effectiveness of the organization (cost management, time utilization, quality management, customer satisfaction).

** Feasibility: Successfully implementing this improvement is possible given existing staffing and time constraints.

Phase III *(Evolution).* This phase includes preparing the affected participants and/or the organization for change, and identifies the steps necessary to ensure that change is lasting. In addition, the details of the new workflow design are defined, such as:

- Accountabilities and competencies required, by role and by interaction and determination of competencies of affected process participants
- Communication guidelines for specific interactions
- Document templates for correspondence identified in the redesigned process

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- Performance measures for the process itself and participants that will enable proactive intervention or support performance reviews
- System functions to enable the process to happen more efficiently
- Business rules to ensure that every person involved performs the process consistently

Phase IV *(Actualization).* In the Actualization phase, participants are coached on all facets of project implementation, which could include physical environment, training, system development, organizational development, and purchasing to ensure success and integrity of the design.

Phase V *(Sustained Improvement).* In this last phase, individual and process measurements for proactive intervention are monitored. Data are continually collected, with periodic audits being performed to facilitate intervention, follow-up training, and coaching. Additional team building is conducted, and improvement opportunities are captured.

System Impact

Using this method provides the organization with a tool to realize gains in quality by achieving customer focus and increasing participation among the workforce. Hidden benefits include trust-building, accountability, and ownership of the process. In addition, this method enables the discovery of (1) multiple, vague, or conflicting goals; (2) commonalities that point to root cause; (3) the discovery of who the customer really is; and (4) identification of unclear conditions of satisfaction.

The workflow study has provided a model for continuing the study of workflow processes and identifying areas of improvement to enhance services to students and organizational effectiveness. This study was one step in several initiatives tied to the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP reaccreditation process and self-study. Cincinnati State has spent two years identifying and developing a set of **institutional values** leading to quality that have been officially adopted by the board of trustees and are being used to guide improvements in organizational effectiveness. These values include the college's pledge to provide a quality education experience centered on teaching and learning; valuing diversity of the college community; honoring the tradition of technical and cooperative education; embracing knowledge gained through experiential learning; encouraging vision that meets the changing needs of the community; focusing on service that exceeds the expectations of students, employers, and the community; supporting personal and professional growth of all who are committed to the college's purpose; and promoting the use and teaching of cutting-edge technology.

The president has appointed a director of organizational effectiveness to lead the college's continuous improvement efforts and co-chair, along with a faculty member, the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP reaccreditation process. A quality council led by the president guides the integration of quality efforts and ensures alignment with vision and mission. Cincinnati State has become a member of the Center for Quality of Management and is providing professional development opportunities in quality tools and techniques through the center. Faculty leaders have participated in AQIP leadership training.

The AQIP Vital Few action projects that guide the college's continuous improvement efforts include a redesign of the leadership structure to include all constituent groups in decision making at a senior leadership level and improve communications; build and deploy a knowledge management system for "front-line" customer service personnel with quick access to accurate information needed to correctly answer questions and direct inquiries to appropriate data sources; and build a system that measures learning competencies of all graduates. In addition, the college's CQIN (Continuous Quality Improvement Network) team facilitates the infusion of the institutional values throughout the institution, works to positively impact the organizational culture, and participates in the sharing of best practices.

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Implementing AQIP: The First Year

Robert McCue
David Fuller

Background

Wayne State College (WSC) was founded in 1891 as the privately operated Nebraska Normal College at Wayne. In 1909, the Nebraska state legislature purchased the college and renamed it the State Normal College. In 1921, the college became a State Normal School and Teacher's College with legal authority to grant baccalaureate degrees in education. The name was changed to Nebraska State Teachers College at Wayne in 1949 when the state legislature granted authority to confer baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts. A graduate program leading to a master's degree was authorized in 1955, and in 1963 the name was changed to Wayne State College. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Wayne State College built upon its tradition as a teacher's college by developing and expanding academic programs in business and the arts and sciences. During the 1990s the college evolved into an undergraduate institution offering a comprehensive curriculum with equal emphasis on the arts and sciences, business, and teacher education.

Rooted in the rural northeast Nebraska community of Wayne, today's Wayne State College is a regional public college geographically positioned to serve rural Nebraska. As mandated through its charter with the state of Nebraska, the college is an open admission institution that admits all applicants who have graduated from an accredited high school or have completed the General Education Development (GED) diploma. The college is primarily an undergraduate institution; however, graduate programs are offered at the master's level in education and business administration and at the education specialist level in school administration. The total fall 2001 enrollment was 3,334 students, and there are 136 full-time faculty and a total of 445 faculty and staff combined.

Initial Considerations and the Partnership Request

Is AQIP a good fit for our campus? In January 1994 a strategic planning process was begun to identify the college's strategic initiatives for the five-year period, 1995–2000. At that time, the president challenged the faculty and staff to begin to think about how Wayne State College could improve the quality of teaching and learning. In 1995 Wayne State College participated in the PEW Higher Education Roundtable process, a national effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The initiatives developed by this process guided the quality improvement efforts of the college from 1995 to 2000. In 1999 the college initiated the next cycle of the planning process with another series of focus groups comprised of members from all sectors of campus (faculty, staff, students, and administration). The goals developed by this cycle of the planning process included statements that were very similar to the guiding values for the AQIP program. This strong similarity suggested that AQIP would be a good fit for Wayne State College.

Are we ready to begin a project of this scope? The AQIP process and introductory material were presented to faculty and staff at the opening meetings in the fall 2000 term. It was openly discussed and endorsed by our faculty senate, student senate, academic council, and the academic divisions on campus. The college's plan to participate in the AQIP process was also approved by the state college board of trustees in September 2000. A partnership request to participate in AQIP was filed in October 2000 based on the support of the campus community and the board of trustees. If you are interested in more information, go to the WSC AQIP Web page: www.wsc.edu/academic/aqip.

Conducting the Preliminary Self-Assessment

Wayne State College completed a preliminary self-assessment in February 2001 using the "Trailblazer Starter Guide." The Trailblazer was recommended as a very good Baldrige-style self-assessment process for institutions in states like

Nebraska that do not have a quality award program. The self-assessment was conducted in a retreat format with representatives from all sectors of the campus. The retreat lasted two days at an off-campus site and was a very important step in fitting AQIP to Wayne State College. Many of the participants now serve on the AQIP council, which coordinates AQIP activities on campus. The Trailblazer retreat provided a structured way for the participants to assess where WSC is in relation to the quality criteria and where there are opportunities to improve. After a thorough discussion, the retreat participants were asked to reach consensus on the "Vital Few" areas that should be the focus for improvement in the short term. The participants then developed strategies and actions that will improve the Vital Few, ways to measure progress, and key indicators of success.

The Vital Few areas are:

- Human resource development
- Building community
- Institutional quality-connected learning opportunities
- Enrollment growth

If you are intrigued by this approach, the agenda and participants of the retreat are listed on the WSC AQIP Web page: www.wsc.edu/academic/aqip. Projects related to the vital few and associated progress reports are also listed on the Web.

Participating in the Strategy Forum

What is the Strategy Forum? The strategy forum is a required activity in the AQIP process. It is a mixture of a peer review process and workshops on useful techniques to use in quality improvement efforts. There was some initial skepticism on the part of those asked to participate from Wayne State College. This was due in part to the length of time involved, the fact that it was a new process, and the fact that people did not know what to expect. The Wayne State College team for the June 2001 forum included: the president, three vice presidents, the graduate dean, and one board member. The skepticism was quickly overcome once the activities started. This is one of the most useful activities for institutions just starting in the AQIP process. The interaction with other schools was very interesting, and the workshops provided useful tools and ideas. Some of the activities we learned about were later used to involve the entire campus.

Who should go to it? It is very important for the leadership on campus to be involved. It was critical that the president and vice presidents participated. Equally important was the presence of a member of the board of trustees. The voice they provide to the other Board members was very important. In hindsight, we should have also included a faculty member. Our next strategy forum team will include faculty.

How do you get ready for it? The sample materials and forms provided by The Higher Learning Commission are very useful in preparing for this activity. Essentially, you need to describe how you arrived at your Vital Few and how you plan to improve those aspects of your campus in the next three to five years. All members of the team should be familiar with the Vital Few and your institution's plans. Information on the materials prepared for the Wayne State College strategy forum can be found on our Web page: www.wsc.edu/academic/aqip.

AQIP Implementation and Campus-Wide Involvement

How do we get the entire campus involved? This is a very important question. During the strategy forum, the team began discussing ways to accomplish this task. As a result of those discussions, we modified an existing event on campus and developed a very engaging activity for the entire campus. Every fall we have an opening meeting for faculty and a separate opening meeting for staff. The agendas are probably similar to those on your campus. To get the entire campus involved, we decided to combine all four-hundred-plus people into one meeting, assign them to groups of six to eight, and have them discuss quality improvement ideas. We carefully structured the groups so that each one included some staff, faculty, and administrators. We had the AQIP council members act as facilitators for each group of tables. Groups of tables were assigned one of the AQIP quality criteria to discuss. All participants had been given their assigned topics in advance, so they had time to think about them before the meeting. After exchanging ideas as a group, each table was asked to reach consensus and prioritize their top three ideas for improving the campus along the lines of their assigned quality criteria. Another technique was then used to identify the top three ideas for each of the AQIP quality criteria. The event was very successful, with many faculty and staff commenting on different aspects they liked. Information about the opening meeting is posted on the AQIP Web page: www.wsc.edu/academic/aqip. The following week, a different technique was used to allow the campus to select which of the final projects from the opening meeting would be the projects for action during the year. The selected projects and progress reports are also listed on our Web page. A meeting involving the entire campus is planned for the end of the year in April 2002. This meeting will celebrate the successes and progress during the year. The opening meeting next fall will follow the same format as this past fall, with some improvement.

Developing Action Projects and Quality Teams

How do we accomplish the identified projects? AQIP council members convene the discussion groups for each of the projects identified either at the retreat or from the opening meeting. These discussion groups are called "quality teams." A quality team includes everyone interested in that particular project. The initial quality team meetings also called on the individuals who proposed the idea at the opening meeting. Progress, notes from meetings, and meeting dates, times, and locations are all posted on the Web pages. The following is a listing of some of the projects currently underway:

- On-campus daycare for students, faculty, and staff
- Form cohort groups in freshmen general education classes, within dorms, in majors
- Teaching teachers to be teachers workshop
- Improve student employment/weekend activities
- Exit interviews and/or one-year follow-up
- Communication
- Establish human resource inventory

Communication and Future Plans

How do we keep people involved? A critical part of the AQIP process is keeping people informed and engaged in thinking about improvement. AQIP activities are listed in the student newspaper and the faculty bulletin as well as on the Web page. AQIP is a regular item on the agenda for several campus committees. The AQIP council is encouraging other groups, departments, etc., on campus to think about ways they can improve what they do at the college. All types of improvement projects will be celebrated at the spring meeting. Current information about activities underway on campus and historical documents, such as the partnership request, are available on the AQIP Web site at Wayne State College: www.wsc.edu/academic/aqip.

What next? The challenge in the future will be to make this a part of the campus culture and to articulate AQIP efforts well with the strategic planning initiatives and the legislative appropriations process. The AQIP council is just beginning to have discussions about these issues.

Summary

The decision to participate in the AQIP process has already had a positive impact on the campus. The quality teams are active, and various groups of faculty and staff are beginning to think about ways to improve different aspects of the campus community. It has been a very busy year and very rewarding, especially when you see some of these ideas begin to work.

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David Fuller is Vice President for Academic Affairs at Wayne State College in Nebraska.

To AQIP or Not to AQIP: Bringing Process and Humor to Your Decision

Linda Nordhaus
Carol Tyler

The last time Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) prepared for an NCA site visit was in 1993. A great deal of effort, as always, went into the formation of a committee structure and a detailed action plan designed to produce a comprehensive report based on which we could be evaluated and reaccredited. It would not be an overstatement to say that hundreds of people and hundreds of hours were involved. We paid great attention to the "process" of reaccreditation from planning and facilitating every steering committee meeting to using project management strategies to organize the two-year preparation.

Then, eight years later and facing another round of reaccreditation, just when we had the approach down pat, along comes AQIP, and we go back to the drawing board. We knew the decision to remain with traditional reaccreditation or to chose AQIP was a big one. We were all busy; we had a new president; we had issues looming surrounding our budget, retirements, and technology. We knew, against this backdrop, that we had to design an AQIP decision making process that was fast, focused, and, as it turned out, fun. In fairly short order, the executive cabinet established a cross-functional committee to make a recommendation to it and to the board of trustees regarding our reaccreditation path. Now, how to get to that recommendation.

Carol Mishler, vice president of institutional advancement, chaired the NCA-AQIP committee. Carol Tyler, president of the faculty association, served with others on the committee and provided assistance in meeting design to Carol Mishler as we laid out an approach to decision making that was as engaging as we could make it through the use of:

- well thought-out meeting agendas and activities
- good meeting facilitation
- graphical and pictorial tools for summary and analysis
- opportunities for advocacy, inquiry, and objectivity

This decision making took place during the 2000-2001 academic year when the definition of the AQIP process was emerging, information on it was scarce, and no one had been through the process. Decision making is easier now. The Commission's AQIP Web site offers a variety of resources to assist colleges considering the AQIP route. Without these resources, we forged ahead.

In summary, this was our situation:

- **AQIP**
  - The new path was an emerging option, not yet fully defined.
- **FVTC**
  - FVTC had a successful reaccreditation process in 1995-1996.
  - FVTC was a successful institution by most measures.
  - The college was facing a busy, stressful, financially challenging year.

- **The FVTC NCA-AQIP Cross-Functional Team**
  - A good cross section of areas of the college and types of employees were represented on the team.
  - A majority of members were knowledgeable about continuous improvement.
  - Two members were Wisconsin Forward Award (state quality award) examiners.
  - Two members had consulted with other colleges on integrating continuous improvement efforts with traditional reaccreditation.

A description of our process and the approaches we used at various steps follows:

Process Step	Approach	Tool
Identify clearly the two paths to reaccreditation	Describe traditional approach Describe AQIP approach List similarities and differences of approaches	Process flow chart Table listing ○ striking differences ○ striking similarities
Identify what we want as a college from a good self-study model	Brainstorm	List of desired characteristics of a model
Determine the cost/benefit ratio of submitting ourselves to a Baldrige-based self-study model	Look at the Baldrige criteria in detail to determine the real value-added to the college of looking at ourselves relative to each criterion	L-shaped matrix ○ what we currently measure ○ how much effort it would take to measure ○ how much value there would be to develop an answer
Identify differences between and among Baldrige-based assessment instruments	Study and discuss: ○ CQIN Pacesetter ○ Malcolm Baldrige Award ○ Wisconsin Forward Award ○ CQIN Trailblazer	L-shaped matrix comparing: ○ levels of award ○ application fee ○ submission deadline ○ length of submission ○ number of colleges that have applied ○ outcomes ○ examiner pool
Identify the four main choices facing the committee and explore each	Identify advocates for each choice and ask advocates to put on a persuasive presentation to the committee covering costs, timing, and involvement needs for each choice	Advocacy presentations for: ○ "Celebrate tradition" ○ "Wait in the bushes" ○ "Dive in and swim" ○ "Go forward"
Make a recommendation	Consider all the information collected, presented, and discussed, and vote	Paired comparison matrix: Each option is paired with each other option. Each participant makes a choice at each juncture.
Debrief on the committee decision-making process	Create group learning	Plus/delta

A decision was made; we decided to "dive in" to the AQIP process despite the lack of clarity in its early stages. Why? We knew it would drive us into a rigorous quality-based assessment that we would welcome. We were ready for a comprehensive, objective, outside view of our organization. We liked and agreed with the focus on continuous improvement, the focus on a critical few improvement projects, and the integration with strategic planning. We were hooked.

It should be noted that the tools and approaches used were very important to the decision making process. The simple L-shaped matrices applied to some research topics made deliberations manageable and limited our inquiry (which could have been boundless). Paired comparison voting quickly made clear the group sentiment, and the advocacy was a lot of fun. Not every tool worked perfectly, but a daunting and potentially time-consuming process was made interesting and engaging without any sacrifice of rigor in decision making. We highly recommend it.

Once the decision was made, a new team was formed and carried this same spirit into beginning the AQIP journey. Linda Nordhaus, Training and Development Services Trainer/Consultant, and others joined the team. One of the highlights of the beginning of the next stage of teamwork follows:

Process Step	Approach	Tool
Choose a quality-based assessment	Advocacy teams for ○ CQIN Pacesetter ○ CQIN Trailblazer ○ Wisconsin Forward ○ Do-it-yourself process	Presentations with music, props, and (we hope) acting

Convincing arguments were made for each assessment approach, so convincing, in fact, that we ended up going through two quality-based assessments–CQIN Pacesetter and the Wisconsin Forward Award. We determined that being able to see our strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of Wisconsin organizations **and** through the eyes of other colleges would be a powerful combination. It was. We submitted both applications last July. We have since received the Wisconsin Forward Award at the Mastery Level, and Fox Valley Technical College is the first winner of the CQIN Pacesetter Award. More important, their views of us are remarkably similar, giving us the confidence to move forward on key areas for improvement.

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Field Notes from Two Trailbreakers: Lessons Learned Using the CQIN Trailblazer for Self-Assessment

Laurie Adolph
Harriet Howell Custer

Introduction

The Academic Quality Improvement Project provides colleges and universities with an alternative accreditation process that will enhance existing institutional cultures and integrate continuous quality principles into ongoing planning and decision making.

Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC), a midsize, rural institution, was granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years by the Higher Learning Commission in 1998. In assessing our experiences with the traditional accreditation process, college leaders decided to investigate the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) as an alternative route to accreditation. Jean Goodnow, president of IVCC, came to believe that becoming an AQIP college could add value to our institution–to the processes and services that underlay our operations and our ongoing commitment to excellence in teaching and learning. During the past five years, IVCC has been engaged in a variety of major initiatives that are based in the principles of continuous quality improvement, including contract negotiations with faculty and other unions and implementation of a new administrative and student information system. The culture of the college is collaborative, with teamwork constituting the primary process for planning, decision making, and implementing change.

Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD) is a large multi-college district located in urban and rural settings. It is comprised of Clinton Community College, Muscatine Community College, and Scott Community College. It was reaccredited as a district for ten years in 1992. That year, John Blong, the CEO of EICCD, brought the idea of establishing a CQI culture to the administrative council. After a year of monthly meetings studying the concepts of CQI and building leadership commitment, a CQI implementation plan was introduced and approved at a board of directors retreat. Dr. Blong then led campus discussions with all employees on the implementation of CQI at EICCD. A four-day CQI leadership-skills training was implemented. At the 2000 board retreat, alternative accreditation with the Baldrige criteria and institutional improvement plans were discussed, and the board affirmed their strong endorsement to continue this organizational direction. Since then, twenty-five district employees have been trained as examiners by either the Iowa state quality award or the CQIN Pacesetter Program. Dr. Blong's knowledge and commitment to CQI and the extensive cadre of employees trained in CQI and Baldrige-based assessment provide EICCD with "the yeast" to rise to the challenges of AQIP alternative accreditation and deeper organizational deployment of continuous quality improvement.

Self-Study and the AQIP Process

Institutions interested in joining the AQIP alternative accreditation project must complete two preliminary steps: the interest exploration and a comprehensive self-assessment. The interest exploration is a meeting with Commission representatives to share information about AQIP accreditation. The comprehensive self-assessment is a quality-based formative assessment of the college's systems, requiring an outside perspective. The choices include: (1) a state quality award application, (2) a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award application and review, (3) an ISO 9000 registration application and audit, (4) a review process such as a quality system framework and a consultant, and (5) a Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) Trailblazer or Pacesetter Review. The Trailblazer is an application meant for institutions beginning the quality improvement journey, and is a short document done relatively quickly. The Pacesetter is for more mature organizations, and is longer and more detailed. Both applications are reviewed by CQIN-trained examiners who provide a feedback report to the applicant organization. IVCC chose the Trailblazer for its self-assessment process.

Preparing the Institution

The decision to pursue AQIP participation was made by the president and vice presidents following the "interest exploration" process, during which they all attended workshops and seminars conducted by AQIP, read and held discussions on continuous quality improvement in higher education, and reviewed the process for participation outlined by AQIP. Once the decision was made, the president formed an AQIP steering committee to guide the process of conducting the institutional self-assessment and provide leadership for the entire AQIP initiative. The steering committee was comprised of the president, the vice presidents, and representatives from administration, faculty, professional, and support staff. Information was provided to the entire staff by the president in her biannual all-staff presentations, and by the vice president for academic affairs to the faculty.

The steering committee reviewed all the options for the institutional self-assessment and selected CQIN's Trailblazer Recognition Process because (1) it was designed by and for community colleges, and (2) it was based directly on the Baldrige National Quality Program's Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. IVCC contracted with Laurie Adolph to facilitate the self-assessment process. She is both a CQIN and an Iowa state quality program examiner, has coordinated seven EICCD Trailblazer applications, and has written several institutional quality applications.

The IVCC steering committee identified a representative group of faculty and staff to participate in a two-day intensive workshop during which the self-assessment would be conducted. This group of thirty-one included the steering committee and additional faculty, administrators, and support staff representing programs and services across the college. The self-assessment participants followed the recommended process in the Trailblazer Starter Guide, with a few changes. The information presented in the presentation are learnings from their collaboration using the Continuous Quality Improvement Network's (CQIN) Pacesetter Educational Program's Trailblazer application. As preparation, participants were provided with a self-paced tutorial to acquaint them with the CQI philosophy, principles, and language. They were also asked to complete reading assignments on AQIP and on the Trailblazer/ Baldrige categories to which they were assigned.

Conducting the Self-Assessment Activities

The goals of the two-day exercise included: (1) self-assessment using the Baldrige criteria, 2) consensus about the IVCC Vital Few Opportunities for Improvement, (3) increased understanding about how to assess the organization using the Baldrige values and approach, (4) increased understanding of the institution's strengths and weakness in its capacity to meet student and stakeholder needs, and (5) a deeper understanding of the AQIP processes, values, and approach. Unfortunately, many organizations see only the first goal to the self- study application process, pull a small group of people into a room, and emerge a day later with a document to send off to the reviewers. While this may meet AQIP requirements, the greater the inclusiveness of organizational levels and responsibilities the group has, the greater the critical mass the organization has for generating the energy and momentum for improvement within the institution.

The outcomes from the two days' activities include information for the organizational profile; examples of college processes and systems to demonstrate how the institution meets the criteria categories; "scores" set by consensus for each category; and identification of the IVCC Vital Few. The Vital Few will be used (1) in the documents, (2) for development of action plans and strategic short- and long-term goals, and (3) to direct the development of the AQIP goals for the Strategy Forum (the next AQIP step). It is critical that the Vital Few align with the institution's mission and strategic goals.

The two days' activities include an overview of AQIP, review of the Baldrige values and approach, brainstorming on the key factors of the organization, an explanation of scoring, small-group brainstorming on the category criteria and the corresponding results sections, team reports on the small-group results, results category work, the identification of the institution's vital few opportunities for improvement, and a discussion of what will come next at the institution.

The ideas generated from the days' activities were used by a writing team to prepare an application draft to be reviewed by the steering committee, the workshop participants, and the greater college community before being submitted to CQIN for review.

Pitfalls and Benefits of Using the Trailblazer for Self-Assessment

Pitfalls that can be avoided or minimized with planning and strategies:

- The processes are new, and not all staff are familiar with language, tools, and approaches.
- Some faculty react negatively to the customer focus and what they see as only a business model of organization improvement.
- The Baldrige criteria are complex and demanding to work with, even as they empower an institution to determine its own directions and priorities.
- Inadequate data and weak institutional research functions can inhibit understandings needed to make effective decisions about the Vital Few.
- The Trailblazer process can generate too many Vital Few opportunities and strain resources as attempts are made to accomplish goals.
- The document may be seen as just another Commission set of paperwork divorced from the day-to-day operations of the institution.
- Training in the tools and process of CQI takes time and resources.

Benefits of using the Trailblazer for self-assessment:

- Initiates a fresh approach to accreditation and establishes a critical group of people experiencing the new accreditation approach.
- Models continuous quality approaches such as teamwork, inclusion, consensus, and the use of quality tools for an accreditation project.
- Provides a staff development activity to familiarize the participants with the Baldrige criteria.
- Provides leaders with specific outcomes for the next AQIP steps.
- Keeps the institutional focus on quality, systematic improvement, student and stakeholder needs, key processes, and performance measures.
- Creates an awareness of the need for accurate and ongoing data, information, and analysis on which to base evaluations and make decisions.
- Creates consensus about the institution's challenges, current strengths, and future directions.
- Preserves the autonomy and distinctiveness of the individual institution during the accreditation process.

Conclusion

Participation in the AQIP alternative accreditation process enables an institution to maintain its accreditation status while adding value to its programs and services, increasing its ability to meet student and stakeholder needs and requirements, and preserving its distinctiveness as an institution. Using the Trailblazer for self-assessment can be a foundational step in that ongoing process.

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Part 1
Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 4
Vision, Values, and Strategic Planning

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 23 – 26, 2002
Hyatt Regency Chicago

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Connecting Ohio University's Vision for Fostering Student Engagement Among First-Year Students with Strategic Planning

Gitanjali Kaul

For as long as one can remember, large research universities have struggled to balance their teaching and research missions. Today, we appear to have a better understanding of the struggle and the pressures that go with fulfilling a complex mission within a context of finite resources. At any given point in an institution's development, it is not easy to discern whether a balance has been struck and, if so, whether that balance can be maintained. Nevertheless, this paper reveals the road traveled by one research institution, Ohio University, to arrive at a balance between its teaching and research agendas, thus making the needs of its first-year students a priority for the entire campus.

A sequence of well-reasoned and deliberate choices pursued by the university in the past few years has enabled the campus to accomplish a shift in its institutional focus. However, prior to delving into these strategies, a few words on the university's current atmosphere for planning, as captured following a recent campus-wide meeting on student engagement, are in order. In 2001–2002, a visitor to Ohio University's residential campus would be greatly impressed with the activities resulting from the institution-wide push for enhancing the first-year experience on campus. The concept of student engagement, and how it relates to Ohio University's first-year students, is a frequent topic of conversation among staff and faculty. Issues surrounding student engagement are on the agenda for campus-wide meetings, dean's councils, department chair meetings, etc. Faculty senate, student services, and administrative services are working together with a new eagerness to provide Ohio University students with a distinctive undergraduate education. These and many other indicators point to a rekindled campus community, hard at work and vying with one another to address the needs of undergraduate students.

This sense of purpose and collegiality captured on campus has been approximately three years in the making. What differentiates the recent Ohio University experience from that of other institutions is that the linking of vision to planning and the making of strategic choices did not follow a textbook defined model of strategic planning. Noticeably missing have been the elaborate process-oriented committees that link teams at all levels of the organizational chart and the linear building of goals from unit and department level up to the vice-presidential divisions. Instead, strategic change has involved transforming the university by having a vision for seizing opportunity as it arose. It involved building on the intrinsic interests of faculty, staff, and administrators at all levels who came together to work on building a common understanding of excellence in undergraduate education.

Outlined in Table 1 are the events and deliberate choices made by the university that have resulted in a renewed focus on student engagement.

1. Revision of General Education Curriculum and Its Tie with the Push for Student Engagement

In retrospect, fall of 1999 appears to have been a milestone for Ohio University in many ways. It was the quarter in which the general education review steering committee began work on redesigning the old general education curriculum. It was in 1979 that the faculty senate had last adopted the existing curriculum, and twenty years later in 1999 the time was ripe to examine its relevance. The university community was faced with the task of incorporating a new perspective in its general education offerings. This new perspective was needed to cope with the accelerated change that has presented itself in all aspects of inquiry and human knowledge. As one might expect, the lofty goal of revising the general education curriculum was one that would get to the heart of the

Table 1

Focus on Student Engagement and First-Year Experience: A Sequence of Events Leading Up To Strategic Change

1999-2000	1. Revision of General Education Curriculum and Its Tie with the Push for Student Engagement
	2. Telltale Signs of Low Student Engagement: NSSE and Other Assessments Reveal Pieces of a Puzzle in Documenting Gaps in Freshmen Experiences
2000-2001	3. New Faculty Initiative in Support of Changes in General Education Curriculum
	4. Exploring the AQIP Potential
2001-2002	5. Presidential Mission Statement
	6. Engaging in the AQIP Exercise and Joining Hands with The Higher Learning Commission to Push for Student Engagement

academic enterprise and transcend the territorial and professional identities of faculty, staff, and administration. For the university community, the desire to influence the new curriculum began to evolve into a stimulus to open fresh dialogue on the nature of undergraduate education and the role of the university in shaping it.

In 1998, Frank T. Rhodes, president emeritus at Cornell, suggested that universities today were faced with three urgent imperatives: recapturing the curriculum, rekindling the community, and reinforcing their priorities. At Ohio University, the task of having the faculty and administration work shoulder-to-shoulder in recapturing the curriculum went on to become the means for rekindling the community and reinforcing institutional priorities. In June 2000, at the end of academic year 1999–2000, the general education committee turned in its interim report, which included preliminary recommendations for defining, integrating, and recreating the new curriculum. The recommendations also included a call for setting high expectations for students in the freshman year and a need to emphasize the first-year experience for students on campus. Among the principles embraced by the general education committee were the following:

> [P]edagogical approach matters more to the quality and rigor of general education than form or content. The Committee recommends that instructors of general education courses combat student passivity by promoting students' active participation in class, enhance rigor by raising their expectations of student's work, and self-consciously encourage students to understand and value course goals and how these goals contribute to their acquiring a broader and deeper education.
>
> A related principle recognizes that the first-year must begin by engaging, challenging, and supporting students in their academic work. The Committee discovered that expectations set for academic effort in the freshman year persist. Students develop "time economies" that are resistant to change. Freshman seminars, learning communities, service-learning courses, collaboration by faculty to set robust standards for freshman courses constitute approaches to establish high expectations in freshman year. (Ohio University 2001, 2)

By accepting these principles, a rekindled university community agreed to focus on the first-year experience of students from an academic perspective. This represented a major breakthrough, not because it was another attempt to bolster the importance of first-year experience on campus, but because the faculty had embraced it as key in developing future pedagogical approaches in delivering instruction. The newly identified priority championed by the faculty leadership would later become the groundwork for adopting student engagement as an institutional goal in 2001–2002.

2. Telltale Signs of Low Student Engagement: NSSE and Other Assessments Reveal Pieces of a Puzzle in Documenting Gaps in Freshmen Experiences

In fall of 1999, at the same time that general education was under review, Ohio University opted to participate in the first administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The new tool had been publicized as one that allowed campuses to explore dimensions of quality that went beyond such things as rankings produced by *U.S. News and World Report.* Knowing the size of an institution's endowment, or student average test scores, should not have any direct bearing on the assessment of quality of instruction or programming that is offered on a campus. On the other hand, the NSSE survey was an instrument that could be employed in evaluating the academic, intellectual, and social experiences of students through a series of questions regarding their actual activities on campus.

The Ohio University decision to participate in the NSSE study was not so much motivated by a desire to look for deficiencies as by an ever-present need to document successful outcomes for students. The hope was that the NSSE survey would provide national benchmarks for the university's high levels of student engagement. This would make available to the campus community a set of fact-based indices to back up the assertion that Ohio University was offering the best educational experiences, at least in the state, if not regionally or nationally. The idea that Ohio University would have high levels of student engagement came from the high ranking the university receives for numerous prestigious programs offered on campus. In addition, it is commonly accepted that the traditional residential campus setting allows one to make great strides in building in-class and out-of-class traditions, all of which lead to high levels of student engagement.

Results of the 2000 NSSE survey confirmed the university's expectations of high engagement for seniors, and refuted them for first-year students. In general, results revealed that, compared to peer institutions, seniors on campus were highly engaged in campus and academic life. The seniors reported a high level of academic challenge in their classes; involvement in active and collaborative learning; numerous interactions with faculty; and a very supportive campus environment.

Survey results for the first-year students presented some perplexing findings, particularly since Ohio University enjoys very high retention of students from first to second years. However, compared to students at peer institutions, Ohio University's first-year students reported large gaps in their level of engagement with the university. These gaps were evident in the responses to several questions throughout the questionnaire, but the responses to a few questions that got to the heart of academic rigor left campus officials with a sense of unease. For example, there were statistically significance differences pointing to the fact that Ohio University first-year students were taking far too many multiple-choice exams. There were other results indicating that our first-year students were spending significantly more hours relaxing and socializing than reading, writing, or engaging in personal enrichment. A finding in the area of diversity was that Ohio University freshmen reported significantly fewer serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity compared to their peers at other universities.

The results of the NSSE survey were cause for serious concern. Credit goes to the university administration for publicly acknowledging the results and making an earnest attempt to both study the problem with first-year students and to successfully involve the faculty in exploring solutions. This is particularly so given that, of the two hundred institutions that participated in the NSSE study, hardly any have made their results public. Thomas Bartlett, in an article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Colleges Praise New Source of Data, as Long as Their Scores Stay Secret," points out that through confidentiality agreements with NSSE, universities have chosen to keep the results for their institutions out of public view.

In sharp contrast to the strategy of concealing negative findings, Ohio University President Glidden, in spring of 2000, commissioned a group of faculty to form a task force to review the concerns being cited by first-year students. This task force, chaired by the president of the faculty senate, began a meticulous search for any other signs of poor campus involvement among the students. The task force reviewed results from other internal student surveys, such as the undergraduate involvement survey administered on campus since the early 1980s. In addition, the task force reviewed reports on factors associated with retention and attrition. They also examined freshmen GPA statistics, trends in academic preparedness, and demographic profiles of freshmen. Finally, they conducted an analysis of courses that were most frequently taken by first-year students and attempted to determine whether these courses were being predominantly taught by inexperienced faculty. On completion of their review, the task force concluded that the academic and other engagement of first-year students had room for improvement.

At the same time that the task force was meeting to fulfill its charge, concern for academic involvement of first-year students was beginning to indirectly surface in other settings around campus. The Ohio Board of Regents was preparing a report card entitled "The Profile of Student Outcomes, Experiences and Campus Measures." They compiled a table for average class sizes for proportion of students enrolled in general studies classes for all Ohio public institutions. In their report, even when consistent definitions for class/section units were applied to statewide data and the statistics were audited as far as possible, Ohio University had the largest proportion of general studies enrollments in sections of more than ninety-nine students. The NSSE findings that Ohio University's first-year students were taking a high proportion of multiple-choice tests and reporting fewer interactions with faculty seemed to substantiate the fact that the general studies sections were too large. The provost's office took note of this statistic and made a conscious effort to understand teaching load data around campus.

3. New Faculty Initiative in Support of Changes in General Education Curriculum

The new general education curriculum being proposed on campus promoted active learning and active class participation. In essence, it was proposing pedagogical changes in teaching that called for frequent student-faculty interaction in small groups. The challenge faced by the university—to implement the new curriculum within its existing large lecture sections—was going to require creative solutions. The pressing need was for additional full-time, tenure-track faculty who would ensure successful implementation of the new general education requirements.

In 2000–2001, the university undertook a three-year programmatic effort called the New Faculty Initiative (NFI) to increase the number of full-time, tenure track faculty. The funding for this plan relied on generating new revenue by gradually increasing the total undergraduate enrollment on campus by six hundred students over a three-year period. An analysis of first-year applicants to the institution revealed that additional freshmen could be accepted without lowering the admission standards or quality of incoming freshmen. Each year the NFI would produce approximately $1 million in additional tuition to be used for creating at least ten new faculty lines. Through the NFI and other new centrally funded faculty positions, the university set out to create at least thirty-five new tenure-track positions (a 5 percent increase) by 2003–2004.

To ensure that the newly-created positions would allow the university to implement the new general education curriculum and raise the overall quality of teaching, the following priorities were identified upon evaluating the NFI proposals submitted in 2001:

- Providing more active learning experiences for Ohio University students, especially those in their first year of college.
- Implementing a revised general education program as proposed in the new general education requirements.
- Increasing the ability to address issues of diversity in the Ohio University curriculum.
- Allowing units that are in high demand by high achieving students to increase their enrollments.

In July 2001, Provost Gary Schumacher announced the successful proposals in the first round of competition for the NFI awards. The eleven new positions created throughout the campus are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

The Ohio University New Faculty Initiative Creates Eleven Faculty Lines in 2001

No.	Department	Position
1.	Economics	General
2.	English	Composition
3.	Film	Post Production
4.	Hearing, Speech, and Language Science	Speech and Language Pathology
5.	Interpersonal Communication	Instructional Communication
6	Management Systems	Operations
7.	Modern Languages	Spanish
8.	Political Science	Politics of Law and American Politics
9.	Sociology	Criminology
10.	Visual Communication	Photo-Journalism, Digital Editing
11.	Physics and Astronomy	Astronomy

The second round of the NFI is well under way and is projected to yield another ten faculty positions by summer 2002. Creating thirty-five new faculty lines in an era of diminishing budgets has to be a coveted goal in any institution. It represents strategic and defining change in the history of the institution. In the January 2002 issue of *EDUCAUSE*, Billy E. Frye wrote: "The greatest responsibility for colleges and universities today is to create a solid, consistent link between the changes that are needed and the mission and basic values of the institution." At Ohio University, creating new faculty positions has been achieved through a commitment to strategic planning and by vigilant attention to the values of the campus. The university stepped up to the task of creating a coherent link between adjustments that were required in implementing a vibrant curriculum and the core mission and values of the institution. In doing so, it also demonstrated that being a research institution does not preclude one from placing the priorities of the students first.

For the cross-section of faculty who devoted a significant amount of their time in redesigning the general education curriculum, the results of NFI should, as suggested by Frye (2002), provide a sense of affirmation, accomplishment, and pride. Further, it should be pointed out that accommodating increases in student enrollment and faculty positions involves exercises that touch all units of the institution. When the institution as a whole rallies behind the recommendations for reforming general education, it strengthens the sense of identity of the entire university community. Hence, it is no surprise that the guarding of turf, pressure for specialization, and the isolation in departmental silos seems to have lessened. Instead, the campus community, at least for now, is dealing with common concerns and common ideas that are tied by a common vision.

4. Exploring the AQIP Potential

In 2000, one of the pressing tasks faced by the university was to begin planning for its 2004 decennial accreditation review by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NCA). In preparation for this review, the university began assessing the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP); a new alternative approach to accreditation that had caught the attention of many campuses across the nation. The AQIP program was opened for the first time in 2000 to institutions in the states covered by The Higher Learning Commission.

The promise of this new approach was that it attempted to overcome the common flaws associated with the traditional outcomes assessment and decennial reviews. A noteworthy aspect of AQIP involved an initial self-assessment in which the institution opting for AQIP would collaborate with Commission staff and representatives of peer institutions to select two to five institutional goals appropriate for implementation on campus. The idea was to pick one issue at a time and study it thoroughly for a couple of years; then, after the stated goal was achieved, move to the next pressing issue on campus. These ongoing mini-focused studies would replace the mega-ten-year review.

The traditional review has a retrospective focus on the institution's progress. On the other hand, AQIP was built on the notion that the Commission would play a useful role in the campus effort to look ahead and plan for the future by allowing the university to select a few goals for focused study. In AQIP, an institution's relationship with The Higher Learning Commission is prospective in nature, allowing the Commission to work side by side with the institution's leaders in exploring and implementing goals for the future. The AQIP option held the promise of becoming a tool for reinforcing immediate campus priorities, rather than being distracted from them during the two years it takes to complete a self-study and host a visiting review team. Early review of AQIP on campus seemed to suggest that the campus might indeed be ready to opt for AQIP and assume a large share of the responsibility in making accreditation useful for itself.

In 2000, while the initial understanding of AQIP on campus was building, it had not crystallized enough to allow a clear link between potential AQIP exercises and the campus strategic planning priorities. As described later in this paper, it would be a year before any relationship would surface.

5. Presidential Mission Statement

Sensing the momentum created by the revision of general education and the ensuing new faculty initiative, President Robert Glidden, during his 2001 state of the university speech the following fall, unveiled a new presidential mission statement. The timing of this well-articulated document could not have been better. The university needed a collective perspective that would provide the glue for the varied tasks and roles of its individual members. Such a perspective needs ongoing dialogue and it was time to renew the university priorities, which had last been spelled out in 1995–1996 in the context of the Pew Roundtable planning sessions.

In elaborating on each of the five goals found in the mission statement, the president suggested that student engagement be the theme and the focus for distinctiveness in undergraduate education. With this public declaration, the stage was set for faculty and staff to have a rubric in which to inscribe their contributions. The theme of student engagement provided a backdrop against which constructive partnerships could form between academic and nonacademic units.

Hannah Gray (1998) described presidential obligations as "enabling people to meet their own highest standards in an environment at once supportive and demanding, enabling institutions to reach, over the long-term, towards their goals" (p. 114). President Glidden, through his 2001 mission statement had accomplished such an enabling task by outlining common goals. For all those who will have a need to question what it means to be mission-driven

Table 3

Goals Represented in the Presidential Mission Statement

No.	Goals
1.	Provide undergraduate students a distinctive education that prepares them for life and career.
2.	Emphasize distinctiveness in graduate education through program focus at the advanced graduate level and creative approaches to master's education.
3.	Maintain excellence in research through support for creative activity and the search for new information, knowledge, and understanding.
4.	Maximize the learning opportunities afforded by a residential campus environment.
5.	Expand service to the region.

Note: Complete text of the 2001 state of the university speech, *Engagement: challenge and reward*, can be found at http://www.ohiou.edu/president/reports/stateof/index01.html.

at Ohio University, there now exists a new answer to a long-standing question. In selecting the roads to be traveled in pursuing teaching, research, and service, faculty and staff have a reaffirmed mission statement that can guide decision making.

Conclusion

In 2000, the *U.S. News and World Report* edition on "America's Best Colleges," included an article entitled "The Big Are Getting Better: Research Universities Are Working to Put Undergraduates First." The theme of the article applies to Ohio University. However, Ohio University's motivation for placing students and instruction first and the means adopted by the campus for arriving at this goal have differed from other institutions. Perhaps this difference in motivation and strategy has accounted for the groundswell of support for a change in institutional focus.

Marcus (2000) wrote, "Stung by the criticism from education experts about the practice of putting good teaching second to faculty research, most of America's 125 research universities are now intent upon enhancing the experience of their undergraduates." Commentary like this does not always resonate with campus constituencies that have been portrayed as a sea of independent faculty in fiercely self-regulated disciplines (Shapiro 1998). Ohio University's push for student engagement arose from the unearthing of an internal finding by the general education curriculum committee, i.e., pedagogical approach matters more to the quality and rigor of general education than form or content. This finding is not an administrative one; it represents, among other things, allegiances of faculty to their disciplines and their need to ensure that no stone is left unturned in promoting inquiry and skepticism in the classroom. With any luck, it is equally representative of our allegiances to the university and to our common goals as members of its community. It is in this context that the motivation for placing students first has evolved as a driver for change on campus.

With respect to strategies for implementing change, the Ohio University approach seems to differ from the experiences of other universities. Creating up to thirty-five new faculty positions in support of revised general education requirements has an important bearing on the future of the university. At other institutions, formal strategic planning that spans many years could have little impact on altering the course adopted by a campus. At Ohio University, change was realized by seizing key opportunities that presented themselves spontaneously. Strategic planning literature is replete with examples of cyclical, multi-step planning engines that begin with performance indicators, environmental assessment, and SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analysis, and continue on with cross-impact analysis. While these planning engines can prove beneficial for some institutions, they are often plagued with participant apathy because it is difficult to find direct links between the planning exercises and tangible enhancements in any program. The key to success in selecting a strategic planning strategy is a thorough understanding of campus culture and constituency groups.

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A Strategic Plan That Puts Learning First

Wayne Boekes
Jane Schulz

Planning is a critically important activity for higher education institutions. Community colleges, in particular, that serve a diverse student population and deal with constant change, are challenged to plan for the future. Community colleges have always placed supreme importance on teaching as their primary goal and activity. The learning college movement encourages community colleges to shift the emphasis to student learning. To many people, this is a subtle distinction, but it can have a significant impact on a college's mission, values, and plans for the future. At Bismarck State College (BSC), the start of the metamorphosis from an institution focused on teaching to one focused on learning has led to the development of a strategic plan that makes a conscious effort to incorporate the learning focus into every part of the college environment.

Evolution of Learning First

Over the years, planning processes at Bismarck State have been developed that link budgeting and planning, use environmental scanning as a basis for identifying future directions, and regularly update the vision and mission of the college. Goals, objectives, and specific strategies are developed to support and implement the mission of the college. This planning process, or a similar variation, is employed in many colleges across the country.

A determination to become more learning centered led to the exploration of the learning college movement, as developed by Terry O'Banion and enthusiastically embraced by many community college leaders. The learning college movement emphasizes student learning and challenges colleges to put learning first. The six principles of the learning college philosophy guide colleges on their paths to becoming more learning centered.

Six Key Principles of a Learning College

- The learning college creates substantive change in individual learners.
- The learning college engages learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their own choices.
- The learning college creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.
- The learning college assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities.
- The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners.
- The learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learning.

(O'Banion 1997)

In 1998, the president of Bismarck State College, who was interested in learning college concepts and beliefs, formed a committee of faculty, staff, and administrators and charged them with gaining a broader understanding of learning college concepts and exploring ways of incorporating the concepts into the culture and fabric of Bismarck State College. Led by the vice president of instruction and student services, this Learning First Committee of interested employees spent the next two years studying and reading about learning colleges, and discussing how learning college values could be integrated at BSC. The Learning First Committee eventually recommended the development of a strategic planning process based on six strategic directions, with student learning being the overall goal. The six strategic directions are learning innovation, learning support, infusing technology, managing excellence, embracing diversity, and building community. Each strategic direction is supported by specific objectives and strategies.

At the same time the Learning First Committee was meeting, two other campus issues were becoming increasingly urgent. First, planning for and implementing effective methods of assessing student learning outcomes had been problematic for BSC in the past, and an upcoming NCA focused visit pushed assessment issues to the forefront. And second, it was becoming increasingly obvious that BSC had developed a campus committee structure that, like kudzu, had grown and spread, becoming time-consuming, burdensome, and often unproductive.

Assessment

How do these two issues relate to the learning college principles at BSC? As we gained understanding about Learning First, as we called our particular variation of the learning college movement, it became clear that student assessment was a critical part of it. Indeed, assessment is central to the entire philosophy. Learning First and assessment began to be recognized not as two separate and distinct issues, but as two interlocking pieces of a puzzle, in which both add to and help each other.

Committee Structure

The second issue, that of the existing campus committee structure, also became linked to Learning First. The Learning First Committee members believed that the planning process could be improved by the development of teams of employees focused on the strategic directions. Six teams were formed with the purpose of furthering the strategic directions and college objectives. Subsequently, the committee structure was revamped, and most existing committees were abolished on campus. The Learning First teams absorbed the work and responsibilities of those committees.

The new structure gave the teams a fresh start and permission to revamp the work of the previous committees, to become integral in meeting college goals, to refocus their efforts on new goals, and to eliminate activities that were no longer pertinent to campus objectives. The strategic directions provided a framework through which the six teams could truly support student learning and college goals and objectives.

Employee Involvement

The Learning First initiative at BSC values every employee's role in student learning and recognizes that everyone makes an important contribution to learning. As a result, employees' opinions are valued and needed. To ensure that employees will be a part of the learning process and governance of the college, every one of Bismarck State College's more than two hundred full-time employees is expected to be an active member of a Learning First team. Each Learning First team is headed by a team leader or co-leaders. Team members are equal partners in the decisions of the teams. As such, Learning First has become not only an important philosophical belief, but also an exercise in democratic governance.

Learning First Council

A Learning First Council composed of the team leaders and staff and faculty representatives was formed; the college president is chair of the council. The Learning First Council meets monthly and functions as a college planning council. The members of the council monitor the teams' activities, solicit faculty and staff opinions, and help ensure that the strategic directions of the college are being supported. The council also serves as a liaison between the six teams and the college administration.

Two Central Questions

Two guiding questions—"How does this improve student learning?" and "How do we know?"—help teams, team leaders, Learning First Council members, and every BSC employee make decisions. These questions keep us on track, ensuring that we engage in activities that really do put learning first and are student-centered. The questions also unequivocally link learning and assessment. By having to determine how we know students are learning, we are assured that assessment is part of every project.

Strategic Planning

The strategic planning process continues to operate much the same as had been developed some years earlier, with one important improvement. The strategic plan now explicitly links learning to the budgeting and planning process. Each team, just like department and other college units, requests and receives budget dollars for its activities, submits strategies that will support the strategic direction, and reports on those activities at the end of the year.

Suggestions for new college objectives and strategic directions are welcomed from teams and are brought to the Learning First Council for consideration. The Learning First Council makes recommendations for acceptance of those suggestions to the president's administrative cabinet. The Learning First team and council structure has flattened and broadened the planning process and has engaged the involvement of many more employees.

Results of the Learning First Initiative

The formulation of the strategic plan based on student learning has taken significant time and effort. What initially seemed like a very different kind of plan has, in actuality, been a refinement and improvement of what was already in place at BSC. We had a good planning process, and student learning was always an important value. What Learning First has done is to make learning first a systematized, conscious, and planned effort. By linking planning, budgeting, and team efforts with student learning, we are more certain that our focus really is on learning first.

In the process of implementing Learning First, we realized that, in addition to the positive results we anticipated, such as improved planning and a stronger emphasis on learning, there were some unexpected added benefits, including increased employee participation and improved communication. These bonus benefits, occurring serendipitously, reinforced our belief in the,Learning First process and helped us realize that good things build on one another. We did not realize at the start of our journey to becoming a learning college that the Learning First initiative would make such systemic and unanticipated change.

The Learning First initiative has helped us integrate planning, budgeting, learning, and assessment. It has made learning a conscious part of everything we do at BSC. Because of Learning First, the committee structure has been streamlined, and employees have greater opportunities for equal involvement and participation. Opportunities for communication up, down, and across the organizational structure have been increased.

Weaknesses of Learning First

Of course, no new initiative or change is without some weaknesses or concerns. The Learning First plan at BSC is no exception. The concepts of the learning college movement still seem nebulous to some people, particularly faculty members who feel that they have always put learning first. Discussions need to continue that will explain the learning college beliefs and explore how a learning college is distinct from other colleges.

The team structure can take time, especially since everyone's participation is encouraged and expected. In many ways, the Learning First initiative has moved us toward more egalitarian and democratic participation. As most people recognize, a democracy is often more messy and complicated than other forms of governance.

People tend to stay in their comfort zones; thus, some team members have found it difficult to accept the new team structure. It has been tempting to take old activities and ways of doing things and try to impose them on the new structure. Employees must be encouraged to think in new and innovative ways that emphasize learning and support the college's strategic directions.

Strengths of Learning First

Weaknesses can also be strengths, and vice versa. A messy democracy, for instance, also results in increased chances for participation and communication. Learning First offers every employee a chance to take part in the governance of the college and to feel that their opinions and contributions are appreciated and valued. It has been gratifying to hear people who previously felt somewhat isolated from the life of the campus community say that the new team structure has helped them feel more a part of the college.

The opportunities for new discussions about learning and how we can support our strategic directions are tremendous and, at this point, are just beginning to be recognized as a powerful tool in quality improvement. Teams are encouraged to discuss and study their roles in the learning process, and not just to organize activities, some of which may not be particularly effective in the new Learning First environment. Permission to reflect, talk together, and adequately plan is an advantage that was not always possible under the previous committee/governance structure.

Into the Future

The Learning First initiative at Bismarck State College is still in its infancy and has a way to go to be fully operational and effective. It is a good foundation, however, on which to build increased employee involvement in the governance of the college, to accomplish planning based on learning objectives, and to focus the entire campus on learning.

Only the future will reveal whether Learning First will truly transform BSC, but the experience of the past three years offers great hope for a strategic plan that focuses the entire campus community on the importance of student learning.

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From Vision to Reality: Building the Anytime, Anywhere, Anyway College

Julie Poulin Siefert
H. Jeffrey Rafn

Introduction

Five years ago, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) experienced an executive leadership change. With the new leadership came fundamental change. The existing planning process was not meeting the demands of the college; therefore, a new style of planning was developed. The desired planning model needed to be able to serve all members of the college in a consistently changing environment. The NWTC planning process has integrated some of the static components of the more traditional model of strategic planning with some more dynamic components that allow the college to meet the needs of its forever changing environment. This paper will share the development and implementation of the current college-wide planning process.

Vision, Mission, Values, and Planning

We will provide all learners with the highest quality, life-long learning opportunities that are

- ○ *What they want*
- ○ *When they want*
- ○ *Where they want, and*
- ○ *How they want them*

So they may continue their learning and successfully engage in a career that enhances their quality of life in a global community.

The current planning process at NWTC revolves around the vision and mission statements of the college. Each was developed with staff and community input, and they drive all decisions at the college. The planning process is also influenced and maintained by several additional forces. These include NWTC's organizational value statements, the community environment, customer demands, and economic conditions. The organizational values adopted by NWTC include: customer focus, learning, accountability, sense of ownership, integrity, collaboration, well-being, taking initiative, risk-taking, and everyone has worth. The vision, mission, and values statements are foundation pieces within the NWTC planning process and are relatively static.

Essential Planning Components

NWTC's planning process is dynamic; however, foundation pieces exist to support its dynamic nature. The foundation components of the colleges' planning process include end statements, critical success factors, key performance outcomes, key performance indicators, decision tree, and action plans.

In November 1999, the NWTC board of trustees adopted a new governance policy, a set of guidelines that replaced all previous board policies. A vital component of the governance policies is a set of end statements that define the core ideals of the college, the reasons for which NWTC exists, and the benchmarks by which the board judges progress. During each monthly meeting, the board receives a report from the college on how it is addressing a specific cluster of related end statements. The board also hears from the beneficiaries of the end statements under discussion. This allows the board members to continuously address the priorities they have established and to better understand the needs of the community. The end statements within clusters are as follows: diversity; delivery; budget development; partnerships; institutional effectiveness; outcomes; basic education and K-12 alternative education; high school student preparation and access; learning; business, industry, and economic development; cost effectiveness; and infrastructure. The end statements are a relatively static component of the planning process and are consistent with the college's vision and critical success factors.

The Critical Success Factors (CSFs) are management focal points and are major measurable determinants for financial and competitive success. They consist of product development, product sales, product delivery, product effectiveness, and organizational development, and are commonly referred to as DSDEO. *Product* is defined as any unit of learning, learning opportunity, or customer service. *Development* refers to the creation and/or modification of a learning opportunity and/or service so that new competencies are attained or the customer receives a service currently not available. *Sales* refer to the process of convincing a learner to purchase or use a product and/or service offered by the college. A sale occurs throughout the lifetime of the learner's interaction with the college. *Delivery* refers to the manner in which the learning opportunity or service is offered over time, duration, method, and/or location. *Effectiveness* refers to the extent to which the learner or customer attained the skills desired and/or the service requested in the manner and time requested in the most cost-effective way. Effectiveness can be measured at the individual level and aggregated to other levels. *Organizational development* refers to the growth and progression of NWTC to a new state of being wherein it adopts a new culture and manner in which it organizes itself into a learning college. The CSFs are a static planning component.

The Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs) present a clear, concise, and precise statement describing a major desired product. The statement is related to a critical success factor and describes the end result or outcome, not the activities or the process. KPOs are dynamic and are established annually or on an as-needed basis.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the criteria by which the attainment of an outcome is measured. The KPI provides measurable and observable specifications for the product stated in the outcome. It begins with the name of the product and identifies one or more of these characteristics: quality, degree of change, percent or number, degree of excellence, or action taken. It must be easily assessed in the context of the action-plan time frame.

Action plans are the working documents that outline the activities of all teams and units within the college. The action plans are based on DSDEO and follow this template: name of key performance outcome; name of key performance indicator; identified specific goal; list of action steps relating to what, who, and when. All recognized teams at the college are required to create an Action Plan addressing the current KPOs and using the DSDEO format.

Dynamic Planning

The ultimate driving force behind NWTC's dynamic planning process is the action plan. It is the action plan that integrates all of the planning components into a functional working document. Each and every faculty work team generates an action plan specific to the primary focus of its work. The team action plans show a fair amount of variability but are acceptable if the plan focuses on the current KPOs. Each division also creates an action plan. The division action plan identifies the projects and priorities of the entire division and is developed from the individual team action plans. Ultimately, the executive leadership team action plan is developed, which integrates the college-wide projects and priorities for the academic year. Previous year's action plans drive the establishment of the next KPOs by the executive leadership team. It is the DSDEO structure of the action plans, linked to the KPOs and KPIs, that assist the college in its decision making and resource allocation process.

Value of Participatory Planning

NWTC is a collaborative, team-based college focused on achieving outcomes. The current planning process has created the necessary leadership and policy decisions to release and cultivate the creative energies of the college staff in order to achieve the institution's vision, mission, and values via product development, sales, product delivery, effectiveness, and organizational development. The vision, mission, and values are achieved by allocating resources, setting and ensuring alignment, sharing information, and holding ourselves accountable to key performance outcomes.

Challenges of Dynamic Planning

The dynamic planning process is not without its challenges. The broadest of these challenges is choosing the proper balance. One must sufficiently maintain and reinforce the foundation of the plan so that the dynamic aspects of the plan do not cause a loss of or an appearance of the loss of direction. Thus, one must constantly communicate the connections between the dynamic action and the stable foundation. Balance must be achieved between maintaining and growing current initiatives while engaging in new initiatives. This results in considered debate on the proper allocation and/or development of resources. Finally, balance is important in determining how much authority teams have in developing and pursuing plans of action. Too much, and you run the risk of losing focus on the vision; too little, and you run the risk of losing the power, creativity, and initiative of teams.

Choosing the most productive and value-added actions to achieving objectives is an ongoing challenge. There are not sufficient resources to accomplish all the ideas generated by a creative organization. So the question becomes, In which ideas should investment be made? As important, How does one continue to encourage creativity if action is not always taken in response to that creativity?

Perhaps the greatest challenge is perseverance. A dynamic environment, while stimulating, is also tiring. Often it means taking risks to accomplish objectives that are not entirely clear. The end result of the action may not be fully understood at the point of taking the action. Formal definitive plans that are statistically driven are not always available. What is clear, however, is that change needs to happen. In this kind of environment, it is easy to let inertia take hold, self-doubt to take root, and inaction to be viewed as relief. Only faith and perseverance can propel the organization at this point. One must have faith that the best decision has been made given the current information and environment. One must persevere regardless of the mistakes and/or false starts made.

Conclusion

NWTC's current planning process is comprehensive, is linked to the vision and mission, and requires accountability in reaching goals. It is a process that focuses on customer service and allows for input from all participants involved. The implementation of the Critical Success Factors, the Key Performance Outcomes, the Key Performance Indicators, and Team Action Plans have given Northeast Wisconsin Technical College the edge in achieving its vision, mission, and values.

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Facing the Facts: Integrating Qualitative Feedback from a Quality Award Report or Accreditation Visit into Strategic and Operational Planning

Karla Zahn
Michael A. Lanser

Background

When an institution receives its qualitative data in the form of a feedback report from an accreditation visit or quality award process, the data can seem overwhelming. This paper outlines a process that Lakeshore Technical College created to bring the qualitative feedback it received from its Wisconsin Forward Award application into strategic and operational planning. The process focuses on narrowing down qualitative feedback and making it manageable for integration into all types of planning.

In June 2000 Lakeshore Technical College (LTC) applied for the Wisconsin Forward Award (WFA), and in November 2000 the college was the recipient of the Mastery Level award. In fall 2000 LTC joined the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP), the alternative accreditation model, through the Commission. Along with the recognition of the Wisconsin Forward Award came the feedback report that the examiners compiled as a result of their review of the application. Faced with the qualitative data that comprised the report, the college implemented a systematic process that brings the data to the forefront of planning.

The Process Steps

1. **Collect the Data**

   Data come in two main forms, qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data come in the shape of words or other indications that do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis. It's important to consider any type of feedback, whether it is formal or informal. It could be from a program evaluation or key informant interviews. The format for the data from the Forward Award was two- to three-sentence paragraphs.

2. **Categorize**

   Categorize the data into a format that simplifies analyzing them. Categorizing the data needs careful thought and consideration. It's an important step that drives all other steps, and if done correctly it can enhance the final outcomes. It's similar to when a researcher re-codes or collapses quantitative data. At LTC the System of Education is a framework that operates like a value chain. The data were categorized into the segments representing the System of Education.

   The six core processes of the system of education are research and market; product design and development; public relations/promotion and advertising; recruitment/retention/customer service/enrollment; product and program delivery; and assessment and institution. Areas considered support processes for the system are budget and finance, information, human resources, auxiliary, and facilities management. Once the data are refined into a manageable format, they are ready for analysis.

3. Analyze

Data analysis requires the use of a set of statistical tools that reduce the amount of detail in the data, summarizing the data and making the most important facts and relationships apparent. At LTC, cross-functional teams comprised of eight to ten members conduct the analysis, similar to the philosophy of action research. The teams represent staff from the different areas in the System of Education. The teams review the data related to their respective categories and make comments. Although the respective manager is responsible for implementing the feedback into planning, it is helpful to have other stakeholders offer input, suggestions, comments, and perceptions. Items not conducive to a specific segment or items representative of issues related to college leadership are analyzed by the executive committee.

Notes on each point or piece of data are taken for planning as well as for future use (i.e., another application for a quality award or soon to be the Systems Portfolio for AQIP Institutions). It is important to note progress that has occurred since the data were created. After noting comments, the team votes on each item using a dual but inverse scale of importance and amount accomplished. The scale is 1 to 10, with 1 being not important and 10 very important, and 1 being not accomplished and 10 much accomplished. The inverse scale creates a high score of 20 for an item that is very important but on which little is accomplished. Once all data are analyzed, they are ready for synthesis.

4. Synthesize

The results of the analysis require simple organizing to produce reports. For example, all data analysis related to human resources is compiled into a report. The reports are distributed to the managers and the vice presidents. Any outstanding issues from the analysis are addressed by research and planning by conducting further research.

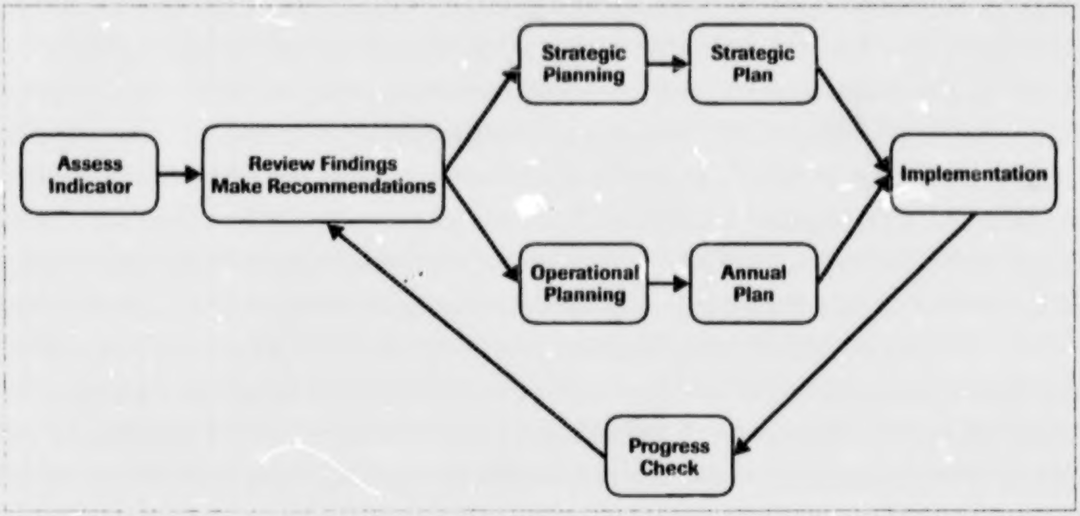
5. Evaluate and Prioritize

Data receiving top scores—in this case, ten key items—are funneled into strategic planning as input. All other data are funneled into operational planning via departmental planning.

6. Submit Conclusions

A synopsis of the results provides a venue for communicating the key findings at an executive level. The culmination of the steps is to review findings and make recommendations as noted in the second box of the assessment process model.

Phase I: Inputs
Assessment Process

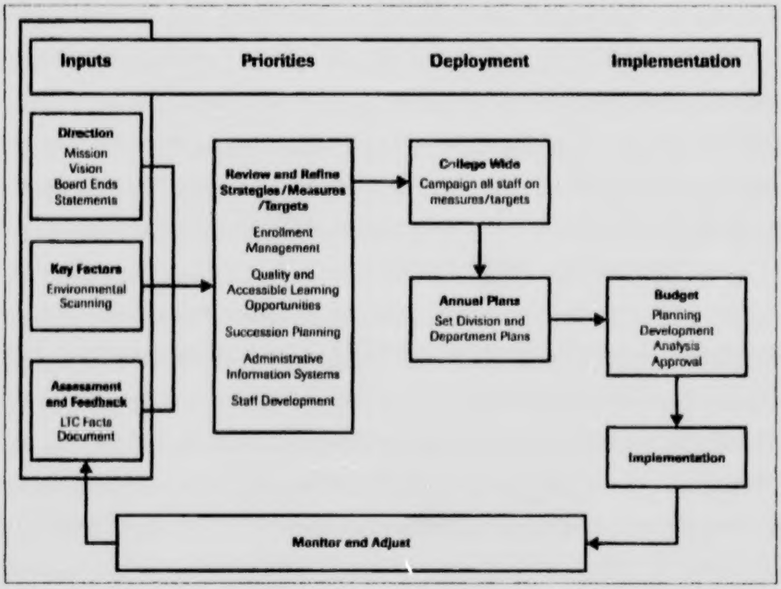


Use of the Data in Strategic Planning

In the spring of 2001, LTC implemented a new strategic planning model. The model has five phases: inputs, priorities, deployment, implementation, and monitor and adjust. The key indicators assessed in the first phase include environmental scanning; the college direction; mission, vision, and boards ends statements; and a variety of internal and external quantitative and qualitative data. If the data flow into strategic planning, they are incorporated into this first phase.

Lakeshore Technical College

Strategic Planning Process


Inputs
Priorities
Deployment
Implementation
Direction
Mission
Vision
Board Ends Statements
Key Factors
Environmental Scanning
Assessment and Feedback
LTC Facts Document
Review and Refine Strategies/Measures/Targets
Enrollment Management
Quality and Accessible Learning Opportunities
Succession Planning
Administrative Information Systems
Staff Development
College Wide
Campaign all staff on measures/targets
Annual Plans
Set Division and Department Plans
Budget
Planning
Development
Analysis
Approval
Implementation
Monitor and Adjust

The deliverable of the inputs phase is the LTC facts document. This sixty-page document is an executive summary of all qualitative and quantitative data for strategic planning purposes. The ten items from the Wisconsin Forward Award Feedback that received the highest scores using this process were included in the facts document.

Use in Operational Planning

If the results of the process produce input for operational planning, the respective managers incorporate the input into divisional and departmental planning. Issues ranked at the top are addressed and become action items for the current year. Other items are tabled for future direction and action.

Software Used for Process

LTC uses electronic meeting software developed by Group Systems, Ventana Corporation. It serves as the facilitation tool for this process. The software itself contains numerous applications. The application relative to this process is called "categorizer." However, it is not critical to the success of the process.

Conclusion

This process brought the data from LTC's Wisconsin Forward Award Feedback Report to the forefront of institutional planning. Managers use the reports generated by this process to aid them in annual departmental planning. Items generating high scores can be integrated as necessary, whereas items generating lower scores can be tabled for later use.

The process allows the executive committee to have a quick overview of key qualitative indicators that need to be addressed in college-wide planning. It serves as a guide for following up on the issues. It gives the executive committee a lens for assessing progress at an operational or strategic level. Finally, it creates a bank of data that can be addressed at any time and provides input for future applications related to quality awards or reaccreditation.

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Part 1
Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 5
Faculty/Staff in a Changing Environment

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 23 – 26, 2002
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Leading for Change: Professional Development Initiatives to Empower a New Generation of Innovators

DeRionne P. Pollard
Russell O. Peterson

Like other community colleges founded in the 1960s, the College of Lake County (CLC) is dealing with the loss of many experienced faculty and administrators through retirement while welcoming many new employees who are challenged to lead the college into the twenty-first century. As these seasoned employees leave the institution, institutional dynamics and cultures are adjusting to the loss of some of the history and to the opportunities to strike out in new directions. These transitions leave the college with staff at all stages of their professional development—from those who are new to higher education to those who have been active in community college education for more than thirty years.

The College of Lake County has developed a comprehensive approach to address the professional development needs of this richly diverse group of faculty and staff. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Office of Training and Development are responsible for directing three highly innovative and successful programs that we believe have made a tremendous impact on our college community:

- **The New Faculty Institute,** an award-winning three-part development program in its third year of operation, orients newly hired full-time faculty to the teaching and learning process through involvement in a semester-long program.
- **The New Part-Time Faculty Institute,** a new development program in its first year of operation, orients new part-time faculty to the college through a five-part program focusing on increasing instructional effectiveness, improving instructor confidence, supporting student satisfaction, and promoting academic achievement within a learner-centered college classroom.
- **The Leadership Institute,** a recognized development program in its second year of operation, orients and updates staff from a variety of levels of the organization about national, state, and local governance issues influencing community colleges.

We are convinced that these programs have had a positive impact on our college community. New faculty members lead curriculum development efforts and assume formal and informal leadership positions within the college, while new administrators lead units in creating new student development initiatives and establish new programs, policies, and procedures in response to a rapidly changing student body, faculty, staff, and community.

The New Faculty Institute

Similar to many community colleges across the nation, the College of Lake County will retire approximately 50 percent of its full-time faculty between 1998 and 2008. Indeed, the massive hiring of community college faculty in the 1960s and early 1970s to accommodate a new and evolving form of higher education leaves many community colleges vulnerable. According to the *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, the exodus of seasoned faculty brings an influx of novices with diverse backgrounds and experiences: those with little or no classroom experience, those who come from the business community, those with diverse educational backgrounds, and those lacking the traditional community college training ground of secondary-level teaching experience. Consequently, while most community colleges have well-developed and innovative faculty development programs, most lack a purposeful, strategic plan to address this new phenomenon.

The College of Lake County is an exception. In order to prepare for this exodus of seasoned faculty members, a formative assessment project was conducted to provide key stakeholders with information regarding the professional development needs of new faculty and to assess how well the institution is responding to those needs. The New Faculty Institute, a three-part professional development initiative, is the result of those efforts. Recognizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of new faculty members, the mission of the Institute is to provide professional development support to new faculty by introducing them to the college and the teaching profession, and to strengthen the teaching skills of the new faculty.

☐ The Assessment Project

There were four research questions in the assessment project: What are the experiences of and expectations for new faculty at the College of Lake County? What are the professional development needs of new faculty? What institutional initiatives hinder or help the professional development of new faculty? What recommendations would stakeholders offer for new faculty development? A responsive qualitative evaluation model was utilized. All new faculty in their second and third year of employment at the institution, three of six division deans, the assistant vice president and vice president for educational affairs, and the president were interviewed for the assessment project. The evaluator, the professional growth coordinator for the college, reviewed the data, looking for common themes and issues. The results were startling:

- While new faculty generally described the college as a welcoming environment, most described a need for more guidance from their colleagues and administrative supervisors. In particular, new faculty indicated a need for professional development activities directly related to teaching and learning.
- Because the college has a seasoned faculty, new faculty members and educational affairs administrators believed that many in the college community have forgotten what it feels like to be a new faculty member. Hence, new faculty indicated a desire for a more thorough introduction to the college community and a more in-depth description of what was expected of them from their first day through tenure.
- Across the board, new faculty members interviewed for this project repeatedly cited the conference experience that new faculty were informally encouraged to attend as crucial to their acculturation process. The conference introduced them to pedagogical issues and trends in community colleges and allowed them to build relationships with colleagues.
- New faculty members described their experiences at CLC as fragmented, challenging, lonely, and uncertain. Most indicated a strong desire for more structured interactions among new faculty.

The comments indicated that new faculty members' professional development needs are not being met.

While the report offered broad recommendations affecting multiple stakeholders within the college community, the professional growth coordinator accepted the following challenges to enhance faculty development for new faculty members at the College of Lake County:

- Establish an intensive, three-day orientation for all new faculty members prior to the regularly scheduled fall Staff Development Week.
- Provide a one-course release for new faculty members and require new faculty to participate in a one-semester professional development seminar that meets weekly.
- Provide a conference experience for new faculty on teaching and learning.

The New Faculty Institute (NFI) is the result of those efforts.

☐ The Program

◇ **Mission.** Recognizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of new faculty members, the mission of the Institute is to provide professional development support to new faculty by introducing them to the college and the teaching profession, and to strengthen the teaching skills of the new faculty.

- ◇ **New Faculty Orientation.** Because a new campus culture requires purposeful interactions combined with practical information, the orientation is designed to provide new faculty members with pieces of essential information necessary to successfully begin their integration into the institution. The orientation serves as a precursor to the sixteen-week New Faculty Seminar required of new faculty during their first semester at the College of Lake County.

  The orientation is divided into morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. Each session is designed to introduce the faculty to some part of the college, allowing them to interact with key administrators and their faculty colleagues. The organization of the orientation reflects the college's organizational structure as it relates to the areas with which faculty members are most involved.

  The first day of the orientation begins with educational affairs. This is the arm of the college under which faculty members and academic programs fall. The vice president for educational affairs reviews the college's policy on the role and responsibilities of faculty members, the evaluation and tenure process, and the college's commitment to assessment of student learning. While our structure is not overly bureaucratic, it is important that the new faculty members have this time with the vice president as he represents the educational arm of the college. The assistant vice president for educational affairs follows with comments on our transfer policies with other institutions. Many of these policies are new and change often, yet faculty members must be aware of them since one of their primary responsibilities is the advisement of students. New faculty members are then introduced to various forms, policies, and procedures of the educational affairs office, and the morning concludes with the instructional developer in charge of the NFI speaking on professional development opportunities.

  The lunch on the first day is crucial because it introduces the new faculty members to the governance structure of the college. The president provides the framework of the national, state, and local structure of the community college in general and the College of Lake County specifically. After the lunch session, the afternoon session introduces the new faculty members to the faculty senate, the internal governance group for full-time faculty, and the faculty union, the collective bargaining unit for full-time faculty. The first day concludes with a human resources orientation where new faculty members learn about health insurance, payroll options, and other topics of importance.

  The second day of the orientation focuses on support services: student development and the learning resource center. Both of these areas provide support services for faculty and students, and it is the position of the college that faculty members must be aware of these services in order to assist students more fully. The morning session is dedicated to student development. The vice president of student development shares institutional policy regarding students' rights and responsibilities and reviews catalog information regarding academic standards. Then, in true student development fashion, the new faculty members are led on a tour of the college that highlights student development areas, such as student activities, the health center, and career and placement services.

  After lunching with their dean, the new faculty members spend time in the learning resource center. After being oriented to the library and its computer system, the new faculty members learn about tutoring services, the math and writing centers, and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The day concludes with a dinner hosted by the teaching and learning center where the new faculty members meet with other tenure-track faculty members.

  The last day of the orientation is set aside for orientations in the academic areas to which the new faculty members are assigned. These include the basics on how to get a key and use the telephone to the more complicated management of the new administrative computer system. Academic areas are provided with a list of suggested topics to review with their new faculty members, but the academic areas take great pride in having their sessions reflect the culture of their faculty members and administrative leader. The day concludes with a dinner reception at the home of the president for the new faculty members and one guest each.

- ◇ **New Faculty Seminar.** The seminar was designed to assist new faculty in the very important task of learning their new college environment while encouraging the development of their instructional delivery to improve student academic achievement. This course introduces or involves participants in the continuing debate over how to improve the quality of undergraduate education by focusing on four specific units: students, classroom management and pedagogy, curriculum, and community college mission and history. Finally, the seminar hopes to assist participants in practicing critically reflective teaching. Critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and examine the assumptions that dictate how we work by viewing our practice from multiple perspectives. Drawing from *Tools for Teaching* (1993), participants focus on four clusters and how those clusters are interrelated: organizing and explaining material in ways appropriate to students' abilities; creating an environment for learning; helping students become autonomous, self-regulated, invested learners; and reflecting on and evaluating their teaching.

The New Faculty Institute was an overwhelming success. Participants have evaluated it as instrumental to their acclimation to the college, and often have spoken of their connectedness to their colleagues and departments. The words of one new faculty participant capture the spirit of this initiative: "I was empowered and challenged, and I never felt alone."

The New Part-Time Faculty Institute

The New Part-Time Faculty Institute is designed to introduce new part-time faculty members to the College of Lake County and our students. The goal of the New Part-Time Faculty Orientation is to increase instructional effectiveness, improve instructor confidence, support student satisfaction, and promote academic achievement within a learner-centered college classroom. The College of Lake County recognizes the vitality, experience, and expertise of our part-time faculty. Simply put, part-time faculty members are invaluable assets to our institution; for many students, part-time faculty members provide the only or most accessible connection to the college. Hence, in support of the college's strategic goals of learning and accountability, the New Part-Time Faculty Institute is designed to orient new part-time faculty members to the College of Lake County.

The program begins with a forty-minute PowerPoint presentation that provides an overview of the college, after which participants are divided into four "companies" based on their academic disciplines. Each company has an assigned "company leader," who is a full-time faculty member at the college. Company leaders lead their part-time faculty companies through the four learning modules. Each learning module is a specially designed forty-minute workshop that covers strategies and resources crucial to new faculty members. After completing their rotation through the modules, the part-time faculty participants meet as a large group to pose final questions, hear concluding remarks, and complete evaluations.

Thus far, participant evaluations have been excellent! In additional to several verbal comments, written comments include the following:

- "By making me a more informed educator, I'll know where to direct students who need additional help."
- "Some of the methods introduced will help me to assess student learning more effectively."
- "I learned new ways to present material."
- "I will be better equipped to reach more students. I will also be better prepared to direct them to other college benefits."
- "[I] appreciate opportunities to talk with other part-time instructors. Being part-time can be very lonely."
- "Make new faculty more aware of these services. I started in January and wasn't really told about these services."
- "Felt very welcome and supported. Friendly staff!"
- "I'm re-thinking how I do one of my lecture-type classes…redo my expectations. I lecture too much!"
- "My being better informed and prepared will improve student learning."
- "They [students] will have a better prepared teacher."
- "This workshop should be required for all new faculty…this could be a full day course."
- "I'll teach better."
- "I want to learn more about what was said in the workshops."

The initial program is supplemented with four workshops that expand upon the topics presented in the initial program: creating an environment for learning, diverse instruction strategies, assessment of student learning, and technology as an instructional tool. The four workshops are offered over four Saturdays and repeated on four Thursdays.

The Leadership Institute

In 1999, Dr. Gretchen Naff, president of the College of Lake County, recognized that there was a need to integrate the changing CLC community by bridging the gap between employees nearing retirement and those establishing careers. Her vision was to create a professional development program that would enable college employees to strengthen their knowledge of the community college history and mission; understand the issues and trends affecting community colleges from national, state, and local levels; develop and/or enhance leadership skills; and understand that leadership within the organization happens at many levels. The assistant director for training and development took this charge and developed the Leadership Institute, launching it for the first time in September 2000, and repeating it in February 2002.

All college employees were invited to apply to participate in the Leadership Institute, and those selected to participate were drawn from various departments and employee groups within the college, including individuals in formal and informal leadership positions. Facilitated by Dr. David Pierce, past president and CEO of AACC, the Leadership Institute uses a two-day retreat format, taking the participants off-campus to a local lodging facility. Session titles in the program both years included the following: Historical Context and National Perspectives for Community Colleges, Pathways to Leadership (Presidents' Panel), Challenges for Community College Leaders, Qualities of Community College Leaders, The Illinois Perspective: State Organizational Structure and Governance, and the Role of the College of Lake County Board and Perspectives on Leadership. Guest speakers represent the best of community colleges, with national figures such as Dr. Carrole Wolin and Dr. Narcisa Polonia leading thought-provoking and engaging conversations.

The Leadership Institute provides a backdrop for the broad issues related to leadership development, after which participants move on to the Leadership Development Series, a three-part follow-up program. The series is designed to extend an opportunity to examine and enhance individual leadership abilities through personal analysis. Participants examine different leadership styles and assess their own leadership style in the first session, learn strategies to solicit feedback about their professional development, and develop individual development plans to help them continue their professional development.

The Leadership Institute and the Leadership Development Series have been phenomenal successes for the College of Lake County. Evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive, with participants encouraging others to participate in the program and serving as mentors for those who complete the program. More importantly, the Leadership Institute has created a place for college employees to contemplate complex and evolving issues affecting community colleges in general while understanding how those issues may affect the College of Lake County specifically.

Conclusion

The College of Lake County recognizes that our continued development as an organization depends on the people we employ and the connection they have to the organization. Through strategic initiatives such as those described, the college is ensuring our vitality and commitment to excellence for many years to come. Moreover, the faculty and staff of the college recognize their responsibility to be active and informed citizens of the college, while embracing this period of change as challenging but not overwhelming.

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Creating and Nurturing a Faculty Community via Groupware and the Internet

Timothy Ricordati
David Overbye
James DeSeno

Introduction

Core accreditation issues of any educational institution include institutional integrity, institutional effectiveness, and the evolving role of faculty. Because of the centrality of the faculty to the mission of our school, we believe that it is essential to create and nurture an effective faculty community. However, conflicting demands of time and space impose constraints on the ability of faculty to form effective communities. This is true in any institutional setting, but it is especially true in a school such as Keller Graduate School of Management (KGSM) that makes extensive use of practitioner faculty in a geographically distributed educational system. Compounding this was our introduction in 1998 of distance education. In fact, the 1998 NCA focused visit for the online program identified as a challenge that "steps need to be taken to relate online faculty to one another within an academic community."

Recognizing that a geographically distributed faculty community could be created and maintained only via the use of technological tools, we embarked on development of an electronic, Internet-based groupware application that we call the Virtual Faculty Lounge (VFL).

Faculty Community

Our first task was to undertake an investigation of exactly what faculty community is and how it could be fostered. This was especially necessary in a distributed educational system such as ours, where the majority of faculty are separated in time and space and have a wide variety of professional affiliations and interests beyond those of the school.

In attempting to define community, we found that there was a great diversity of opinion. Some common elements did manifest themselves, however. Among these were that people in a community (1) share a commonality of interests, (2) live or work under the same system of government or administration, and (3) engage in a sharing of and exploration of ideas and experiences. This suggested to us that one extremely important aspect of community was communication, especially to allow for the sharing and exploration of ideas. Many scholars feel that communication is the primary vehicle through which social interaction is realized.

Fostering community is also heavily dependent on facilitating group interactions and horizontal communication among the various group members. In a physical setting, this horizontal communication is facilitated through physical proximity, common areas such as offices and libraries that foster ad hoc discussion, and formal committee meeting structures. In addition, the sharing of the written material associated with the academic endeavor is important to effective communication.

We concluded that the primary process necessary for developing and fostering a faculty community is to provide opportunities for rich and diverse interaction of both formal and ad hoc groups of individuals.

Groupware

If we accept the premise that the interactions and processes of groups of individuals are the essence of faculty community, then it is logical to look for a facilitating solution in the general area of what is known in information sciences as "groupware." Essentially, groupware consists of two major components: software and communications capabilities. If a system could be deployed that would be accessible to every faculty member with little or no technical training and that included software tools that would support group processes, then we believed that a faculty community would be developed and fostered.

Until very recently, the provision of a uniform communications system to the more than one thousand geographically distributed individuals who comprise the Keller faculty would have been unthinkable. Issues of standardization, access, and physical connectivity would have been overwhelming. However, with the advent of the Internet and standardized Web browser software, these issues evaporate. Thus, Keller decided early on that any developed system would have to allow for faculty access through simple Web browser software, which is now widely available. If this could be provided, then access would not be an issue.

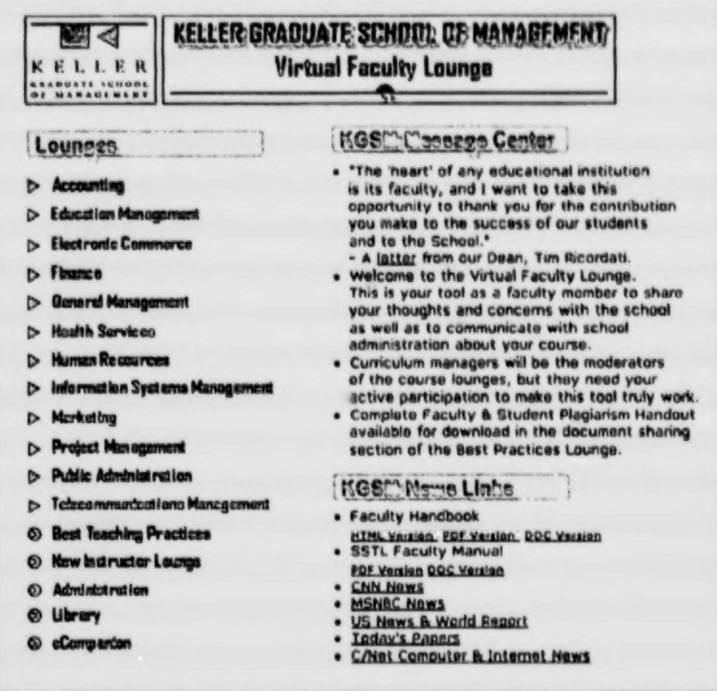
Once the decision had been made to make the system browser-based, the more profound issue became that of exactly what software tools to provide. We found the work of Grundin (1994) to be especially useful in helping us implement the system. The most significant of his eight challenges was the importance of including the system's user in the development process. We thus worked closely with several faculty members, who had experience teaching online as well as onsite, to identify the tools and capabilities that any system must provide. The tools described below were the outcome of this process.

The Virtual Faculty Lounge

Our first choice in the development of a groupware tool was to identify an acceptable prepackaged system. In our investigation however, we did not find a commercially available tool that met our needs. Therefore, we decided to develop our own. We looked at the issues, recognized what functionality was and was not needed, and then proceeded to utilize a number of internal resources in our academic and information technology departments who developed the Virtual Faculty Lounge (VFL) to our specifications. We were fortunate to have individuals on staff with substantial computer programming and Web development experience.

Keller's VFL is extremely functional and works without complicated instruction. It provides communication functions and serves as a repository of experience. It is easily maintained and cost-effective. The VFL provides faculty with the ability to exchange ideas, obtain information, discuss course-related issues, and interact with other faculty and academic staff at Keller via the Internet. The VFL was activated in June 2001, after having gone through a number of alpha and beta stages. On July 17 a counter was added to record the number of times the VFL was accessed. The counter has recorded, on average, five hundred hits per month since that time.

The VFL includes virtual lounges for all disciplines and their corresponding courses. Also included are virtual lounges for best teaching practices, new instructors, general administration, online library, and eCompanion (a Web based supplement for onsite classes).



KELLER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
Virtual Faculty Lounge

Lounges

- Accounting
- Education Management
- Electronic Commerce
- Finance
- General Management
- Health Services
- Human Resources
- Information Systems Management
- Marketing
- Project Management
- Public Administration
- Telecommunications Management
- Best Teaching Practices
- New Instructor Lounge
- Administration
- Library
- eCompanion

KGS℠ Message Center

- "The 'heart' of any educational institution is its faculty, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the contribution you make to the success of our students and to the School."
  - A letter from our Dean, Tim Ricordati.
- Welcome to the Virtual Faculty Lounge. This is your tool as a faculty member to share your thoughts and concerns with the school as well as to communicate with school administration about your course.
- Curriculum managers will be the moderators of the course lounges, but they need your active participation to make this tool truly work.
- Complete Faculty & Student Plagiarism Handout available for download in the document sharing section of the Best Practices Lounge.

KGS℠ News Links

- Faculty Handbook
  HTML Version PDF Version DOC Version
- SSTL Faculty Manual
  PDF Version DOC Version
- CNN News
- MSNBC News
- US News & World Report
- Today's Papers
- C/Net Computer & Internet News

Figure 1. Virtual Faculty Lounge Home Page

The home page of the VFL (Figure 1) contains gateways to the various lounges, as well as a message center and links to other sites. Features and tools incorporated in each lounge include uploading and downloading documents,

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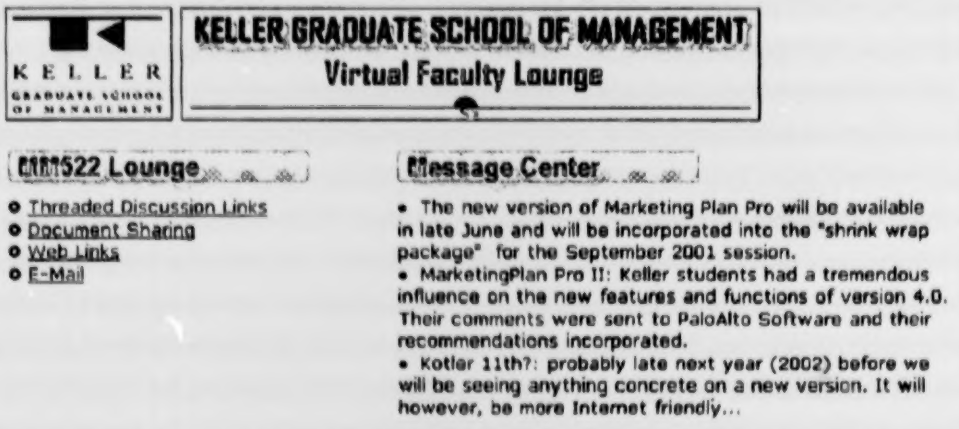
threaded discussions, e-mail, Web linking, messages, and news links. Faculty and academic staff have full use of any of the lounges and are able to use the features and tools within each lounge. Course-specific lounges have e-mail capabilities to all faculty who teach that course. The site is secure for instructors and does not permit student access.

A specific course lounge is illustrated in Figure 2. All the course specific lounges consist of a number of features: threaded discussions, document sharing, Web links, an e-mail function, and a message center. The benefits and use of these features follow.

Threaded Discussions

Perhaps the most useful feature of the VFL is the threaded discussion feature. A threaded discussion is an ongoing dialog that evolves over time relating to various topics and subtopics. The thread might begin with a discussion question on the appropriateness of the text, for example. Faculty then add their comments to the threaded discussion.



- Threaded Discussion Links
- Document Sharing
- Web Links
- E-Mail

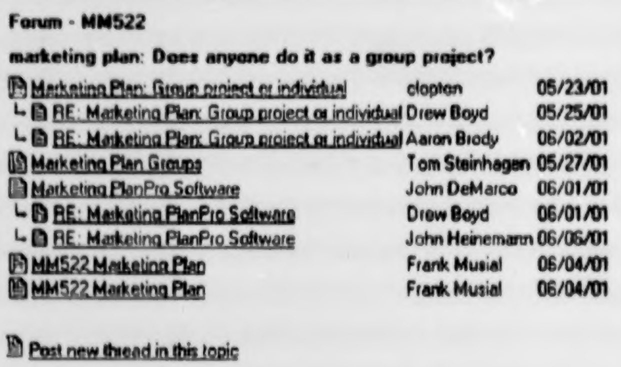
- The new version of Marketing Plan Pro will be available in late June and will be incorporated into the "shrink wrap package" for the September 2001 session.
- MarketingPlan Pro II: Keller students had a tremendous influence on the new features and functions of version 4.0. Their comments were sent to PaloAlto Software and their recommendations incorporated.
- Kotler 11th?: probably late next year (2002) before we will be seeing anything concrete on a new version. It will however, be more Internet friendly...

Figure 2. Example of Specific Course Lounge

Because a thread is ongoing, faculty can see the comments made by their colleagues and can respond to one another's comments. This allows for a high level of horizontal communication and collaborative exploration of the thread topic. There are a number of topics and issues faculty might choose to discuss using the threaded discussions feature. For example:

1. Discussions of best teaching practices and methods.
2. Consideration of pedagogical material such as textbooks, cases, workbooks, Web sites, and other related information.
3. Discourse on current and evolving practices in managerial disciplines.

Threaded discussions are asynchronous and can continue over an indefinite period of time. Figure 3 illustrates several threaded discussions in a marketing class.



Forum - MM522

marketing plan: Does anyone do it as a group project?

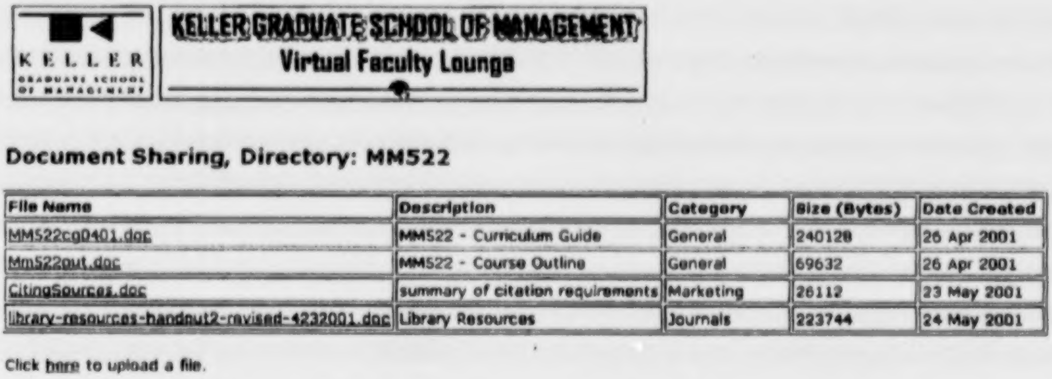
Marketing Plan: Group project or individual	clopton	05/23/01
└ RE: Marketing Plan: Group project or individual	Drew Boyd	05/25/01
└ RE: Marketing Plan: Group project or individual	Aaron Brody	06/02/01
Marketing Plan Groups	Tom Steinhagen	05/27/01
Marketing PlanPro Software	John DeMarco	06/01/01
└ RE: Marketing PlanPro Software	Drew Boyd	06/01/01
└ RE: Marketing PlanPro Software	John Heinemann	06/06/01
MM522 Marketing Plan	Frank Musial	06/04/01
MM522 Marketing Plan	Frank Musial	06/04/01

Post new thread in this topic

Figure 3. Threaded Discussion

Document Sharing

The document sharing feature is one of the most extensively used tools in the VFL. In document sharing, faculty and academic staff can share file-based information with each other. This feature is easy to use and provides a quick and costless way to provide (upload) such items as curriculum guides, sample papers, projects, course resources, and



KELLER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
Virtual Faculty Lounge

Document Sharing, Directory: MM522

File Name	Description	Category	Size (Bytes)	Date Created
MM522cg0401.doc	MM522 - Curriculum Guide	General	240128	26 Apr 2001
Mm522out.doc	MM522 - Course Outline	General	69632	26 Apr 2001
CitingSources.doc	summary of citation requirements	Marketing	26112	23 May 2001
library-resources-handout2-revised-4232001.doc	Library Resources	Journals	223744	24 May 2001

Click here to upload a file.

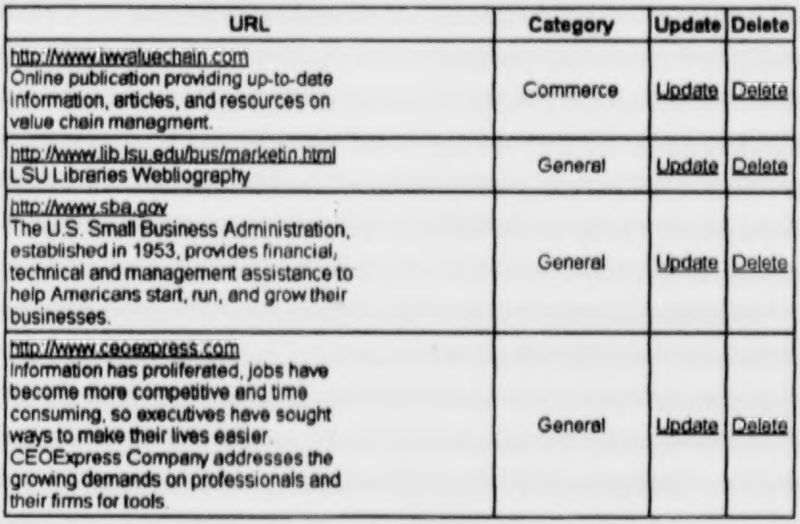
Figure 4. Document Sharing

other materials. Once the material has been saved in the document sharing area, it can be downloaded by any faculty member having access to the system. The ability to upload and download files of any type has proven to be extremely useful to faculty and has greatly facilitated the sharing of best instructional practices among faculty.

Document sharing becomes a repository of electronically saved information that is available at any time on any day. This feature is useful to both new and continuing faculty members as well as to the academic staff to share information directly or indirectly related to the course.

Web Links

The Web links tool is a quick and easy way to create links to Web sites that provide course related information. Faculty can share this information with each other, and the identified sites can also be shared with students via the KGSM eLearning tool used to supplement onsite course work. Figure 5 illustrates some Web sites that have been identified for a specific course.



URL	Category	Update	Delete
http://www.iwvaluechain.com Online publication providing up-to-date information, articles, and resources on value chain managment.	Commerce	Update	Delete
http://www.lib.lsu.edu/bus/marketin.html LSU Libraries Webliography	General	Update	Delete
http://www.sba.gov The U.S. Small Business Administration, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses.	General	Update	Delete
http://www.ceoexpress.com Information has proliferated, jobs have become more competitive and time consuming, so executives have sought ways to make their lives easier. CEOExpress Company addresses the growing demands on professionals and their firms for tools	General	Update	Delete

Figure 5. Web Links

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Communication Tools

Another advantage that Keller's VFL provides is a way for faculty to communicate with other faculty members who are teaching the same course. Communication can take place with a single individual, multiple instructors, or all faculty teaching the course. Because e-mail addresses are listed by name, it is easy to find the person one wishes to contact. For new faculty, this is a way to ask questions of those who have had experience teaching the course.

Keller's VFL also provides the ability to contact some or all faculty school-wide through a unique e-mail database breakdown in each course lounge as well as school-wide e-mail capability within the Best Practices Lounge.

Additional communications features include the "Message Center" and "News Links." The message center is available on the home page as well as in all course- and subject-specific lounges and allows messages to be posted by school administrators. This allows for effective need-to-know communication of school or course policy changes and other administrative messages. News links provide an easy way to access important school related information, current events, news, commentary, periodicals, and other relevant communication sites.

Conclusion

With DeVry University's resources in education, information systems, and database management, Keller continues to nurture and grow this groupware program to maintain, cultivate, and improve the VFL's features and effectiveness, allowing its faculty and academic staff to communicate effectively and share diverse resources through this new age electronic media. Faculty response to this new communication initiative has been very positive. Faculty find the information in the VFL relating to the course(s) they teach to be a valued aid in the classroom. Having the ability to share information with other faculty has not only provided extensive practical resource, but has also created a centralized groupware space in a non-centralized world. Keller's faculty have found they now have a common place to share information and communicate with their peers. This has been especially important to new faculty. The VFL has proven to be an easy way to find information and input in addition to the Excellence-in-Teaching program that they complete before teaching their first Keller course.

Keller's Virtual Faculty Lounge, although in its first year of discovery, has proven to be a valuable tool in the school's goal of continuing to create a dynamic real-world learning environment for students by providing faculty with a tool to communicate and share resources.

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Strategies for Compensating Adjunct Faculty

Robert P. Hamill

Introduction

Higher education institutions are called upon to manage their financial resources in such a way as "to maximize [their] capability to meet [their] purposes" (NCA Criterion Two). This warrants good stewardship by the institution.

Higher education institutions must also organize and allocate their resources "to support [their] plans for strengthening both [themselves] and [their] programs" (NCA Criterion Four). This implies that resources should be allocated in the best manner possible from both an institutional and faculty point of view.

Good stewardship (Criterion Two) and proper resource allocation (Criterion Four) are essential to the financial well-being of the institution. One of the key ingredients to financial well-being is faculty compensation.

With the growing use of adjuncts,[1] it is incumbent upon institutions to address how they will compensate them. How much should they pay? Should they offer benefits? Should they pay stipends? What other ways can they recognize adjuncts? This paper will address these issues. Using data from two surveys (one formal and one informal), this paper will help readers develop strategies concerning adjunct compensation.

The Rising Use of Adjuncts

Higher education institutions are employing adjuncts in increasing numbers (Fogg 2001). Fogg cites a study, released in 1999, that was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. The study, based on a survey of almost one thousand higher education institutions, revealed that

- in 1998, about four out of every ten faculty were *adjunct;*
- from 1993 to1998, 40 percent of schools *reduced* the number of *full-time faculty*, with about 25 percent replacing them with adjuncts;
- at public two-year institutions, the percentage of *full-time faculty* was the lowest at 35 percent;
- at private comprehensive institutions, the percentage of *adjuncts* teaching undergraduate courses was the highest at 30 percent;
- at public research institutions, the percentage of *full-time faculty* was the highest at 79 percent; and
- at private liberal arts institutions, the percentage of *full-time faculty* teaching undergraduate courses was the highest at 79 percent.

The National Adjunct Faculty Guild calls itself the only national professional association for adjuncts. This organization claims that there are over *400,000 adjuncts.*

Adjunct Nation[2] bills itself as a resource for part-time college faculty and publishes a magazine called *The Adjunct Advocate.* In the Administrator Corner section on its Web site, Adjunct Nation, citing data from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Education Association, states that adjuncts comprise about *half of the faculty* in U.S. colleges and universities.

Community College Adjunct Faculty Compensation Survey

At the Adjunct Nation Web site, I located a study titled, "Adjunct Faculty Compensation Survey," in which Warren Mosby[3] surveyed approximately 350 community colleges about compensation and benefit matters. Mosby received 170 responses. Although the survey is undated, it appears to have been conducted fairly recently. It includes responses from community colleges in all fifty states.

Table 1 lists the high, low, and midpoint per credit amounts, however, only data for those states in The Higher Learning Commission region have been reproduced.

Table 1: High, Low, and Midpoint *Per Credit Hour* Amounts[4]

State	Low	High	Midpoint	No. of Reporting Institutions
Arkansas	$300	$491	$396	3
Arizona	$425	$525	$475	4
Colorado	$420	$452	$436	2
Iowa	$336	$490	$413	4
Illinois	$330	$630	$480	7
Indiana	$500	$500	$500	1
Kansas	$300	$419	$360	3
Michigan	$393	$925	$659	5
Minnesota	$525	$1050	$788	3
Missouri	$470	$832	$651	2
North Dakota	$550	$550	$550	1
Nebraska	$450	$500	$475	2
New Mexico	$470	$627	$549	3
Ohio	$310	$875	$593	4
Oklahoma	$300	$450	$375	5
South Dakota	$400	$750	$575	2
Wisconsin	$264	$1138	$701	7
West Virginia	$275	$400	$338	1
Wyoming	$321	$710	$516	4

Table 2 is a compilation of benefits offered.

Table 2: Types of *Benefits*[5] Offered

Type of Benefit	No. of Reporting Institutions	Percent of Reporting Institutions
Tuition credits (accrued in some cases)	18	26%
Retirement plans	18	26%
Health care plans (partially or totally paid by the school in many cases)	11	16%
Fitness/wellness programs	6	9%
Sick leave (accrued in some cases)	4	5%
E-mail/voice mail accounts	4	5%
Life insurance	3	4%
Disability insurance	2	3%
Internet access	2	3%
Events pass	2	3%
Totals	70	100%

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Informal Survey of CAAHE Institutions

During the summer of 2001, I conducted an informal survey of the twenty-four institutions that belong to the Consortium for the Advancement of Adult Higher Education (CAAHE), of which my institution is a member. I asked each institution about its adjunct compensation and benefits practices. I received fourteen fairly complete responses, which represents a 58 percent response rate. Here's what I discovered.

- **Many schools** use some type of *pay scale* based on professional experience, degrees earned, and teaching experience (or some combination thereof).
- **A few schools** pay a *flat fee* per course.
- **Most schools** offer *library* privileges.
- **A few schools** pay additional *stipends,* based on the use of technology in teaching the course and/or the number of students in the course.
- **Most schools** reimburse adjuncts for *mileage,* with some paying for all miles and others paying for miles above a certain amount (e.g., 15 to 30 miles).
- **A few schools** grant *rank* to adjuncts.
- **Most schools** reimburse faculty for *out-of-pocket* costs such as supplies, copies, and mailing.
- **A few schools** *withhold pay* until grades are submitted.
- **A few schools** provide *professional development* sessions and/or funds.
- **One school** pays adjuncts on a *split* basis (i.e., once at the mid-point of the course and once at the end).
- **Most schools** pay adjuncts *once,* at the end of the course.
- **One school** mandates *attendance* at training sessions, paying a stipend and mileage.
- **One school** offers a *partial tuition reimbursement* for the adjunct's children who attend the institution, based on income earned by the adjunct.
- **No schools** reported paying or offering any *benefits* to adjuncts.

Compensation Strategies

The plight of the underpaid adjunct is becoming a growing concern. There appears to be a rapidly-advancing grass roots movement to organize part-time faculty (Leatherman 2001). This movement, apparently, has caught the attention of the American Federation of Teachers, which, has published a position paper on the matter entitled "The Vanishing Professor." In his study, Mosby writes that "a number of administrators mentioned that the adjunct faculty morale was boosted by these types of benefits." It would behoove an institution, therefore, to develop and implement a policy to compensate adjuncts fairly and within its resource constraints.

Following are some strategies for two types of institutions: (1) those with *few* resources and (2) those with *more than a few* resources. These strategies concern compensation, benefits, stipends, and other forms of recognition.

1. **Institutions with *few* resources**
    - Flat fee (with no increments) based on degree level
    - Library privileges
    - Mileage reimbursement for teaching at a site more than a minimum number of miles away
    - Reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs such as supplies, copies, and mailing, with ceilings on each
    - One check at the end of the teaching session **after** grades are submitted and other contractual duties are fulfilled

- Modest stipend for attendance at training sessions and/or graduation
- Outstanding faculty awards
- Events passes
- No rank or rank improvement
- No stipends for additional students or use of technology in the classroom
- No benefits (except, perhaps, tuition credits)
- No e-mail accounts

2. Institutions with *more than a few* resources

- Incremental compensation rate, based on degree level, satisfactory teaching evaluations, and number of courses, nights, classes, and/or workshops taught
- Library privileges
- Full mileage reimbursement for teaching
- Reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs such as supplies, copies, and mailing, with ceilings on each
- One check at the end of the teaching session **after** grades are submitted and other contractual duties are fulfilled
- Modest stipend plus mileage reimbursement for attendance at training sessions and graduation
- Outstanding faculty awards
- Rank, based on degree level, satisfactory teaching evaluations, and number of courses, nights, classes, and/or workshops taught
- Rank improvement
- Recognition for contributions in the workplace and the community
- Stipends for additional students and, possibly, use of technology in teaching
- Some combination of the following benefits: events passes, tuition credits, medical, dental, retirement, wellness, sickness, Internet access, life insurance, disability insurance
- E-mail accounts
- Institutional service awards

Concluding Words

Stewardship and resource allocation are directly related to adjunct compensation. As the use of adjuncts continues to rise, higher education institutions will need to focus their efforts on developing a fair adjunct compensation policy. No matter how many resources an institution has, it should be able to implement strategies that adequately compensate adjuncts.

Notes

[1] My research indicated the use of traditional descriptors such as *"adjunct"* and *"part-time,"* as well as newer terms like *"contingent"* and *"temporary."* While the usage and definition of such terms may vary among institutions, for purposes of this paper, I will use the term *adjunct*.

[2] Although Adjunct Nation and the National Adjunct Faculty Guild have separate Web sites, the two seem to be related, with the latter stating that it has transferred some of its resources to the former.

[3] I attempted to contact Mr. Mosby via e-mail on two different occasions to discuss his study. Both attempts were unsuccessful.

[4] Adjunct Nation reports adjunct pay of $2,000-$2,500 **per course,** which, assuming a three-credit course, is significantly greater than all of the "low" amounts, *over half* of the "high" amounts, and *all but four* of the "midpoint" amounts. I suspect that Adjunct Nation is reporting the pay for an adjunct who carries a heavier teaching load than one who teaches just one or two courses.

[5] According to the aforementioned NCES survey, about *half* of the schools surveyed made benefit contributions on behalf of adjuncts.

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Changing Faculty: Integrity in the Classroom

Kay Kunst Clawson

Teaching has become a focal point of discussion for all strata of American society. College faculty members have been and are now the instructors who have the responsibility for preparing and creating the next generation of leaders. Historically, college professors have been considered experts in specific content areas solely on the basis of being college professors. All faculty members are expected to be competent in establishing their course outlines, organizing their teaching procedures, and generating student curiosity that ultimately results in a successful teaching format (Kemp 1987). Since the early 1990s, it has been important to investigate the overall effectiveness of the teaching careers of faculty in higher education. The trend nationally is changing who teaches in higher education. The devoted tenured faculty member who was a teacher and researcher and gave service to the community is no longer seen as the most desirable educator on campuses nationwide. Part-time faculties not on the tenure track seem to have become the majority in the faculty ranks.

Teaching along with research and community service are the foundations upon which the tenets of higher education are based. The importance of teaching in higher education has been one of the triad hallmarks of our educational system, but over the past years teaching has been relegated to a position of lesser importance (Stevens 1988). Faculty members need to be aware of their impact on the future generations of students and realize that they are an integral part of the learning environment.

Fulton (2000) analyzed the issue of part-time faculty as the numbers increase across the United States. He found that an increasing number of tenured colleagues "criticized colleges and universities for turning a blind eye to what is to many a regressive, unethical practice that strikes at the heart of academic quality." This paper will look at the beliefs of full-time faculty and part-time faculty in the classrooms of higher education and question whether the integrity in the classroom is being maintained.

Full-Time Faculty

Many of the studies in the 1980s and 1990s revealed various beliefs that faculty members held to be true. According to Dunkin (1990), teaching was considered a chore by lecturers. Sacken (1990) evaluated the importance of teaching and found that teaching performance was really unimportant unless a college needed a reason not to grant tenure or to release a non-tenured faculty member. Chism et al. (1989) believed that teachers accumulate a body of practical theories of teaching based on repeated experiences over a period of time. Menges and Rando (1989) felt that teachers developed theories to separate and categorize their experiences.

McCrae (1993) studied the stability of an individual's personality to see if basic feelings and attitudes change over a period of time. This study revealed the need to reconsider situational influences rather than personality traits when analyzing attitudes. Beliefs and attitudes by teachers regarding their effectiveness in the classroom and their ability to bring about change in the learner have been analyzed. Bentz et al. (1992) found the more experience a teacher has attained, the more confidence the teacher develops about his or her own ability to bring about learning outcomes. It was revealed how important it was for teachers to be aware of the misconceptions about teaching in order to develop positive attitudes and beliefs about teacher effectiveness. Tenured faculty members with experience reflect how attitudes and beliefs evolve with years of teaching. Variables such as years of experience, gender, age, and discipline create various beliefs and attitudes among college professors.

Tenured faculty members acknowledge that faculty attitudes toward work may vary from non-tenured faculty because of job security. Dunkin and Precians (1992) and Clawson (1994) researched experienced faculty and found that tenured, full professors have the freedom to talk about teaching very openly owing to job security and that they viewed their own teaching as successful. This concurred with Kinney and Smith (1992), who conducted research on faculty age and teaching effectiveness as faculty approach retirement. They are in a special situation because of the "unique arrangement between employer and employee in our society" (1992, p. 283). Groups surveyed were limited to humanities, social sciences, and physical and biological sciences. The empirical research in the study revealed "a significant relationship between student evaluations of teaching effectiveness and age among the active tenured faculty and that the relationship varies structurally across the broad discipline categories of humanities, social sciences, and physical and biological sciences" (Kinney and Smith 1992, p. 299). The results showed that faculty attitudes toward teaching continue to be that of effective educators.

In 1992, Anne Reynold explored the changes that novice faculty members make in order to "cope in an environment where their views of social interdependence differ from that of the existing culture" (p. 637). After completing a literature review on beginning professors, faculty career development, women in academia, and socialization, she came to the following conclusions. Because of different expectations and practices, new faculty find the culture in higher education hard to understand. New faculty members are not always prepared in graduate school to be teachers, colleagues, and alone academics. As new faculty members learn the job and form attitudes, a critical period of commitment to the academic way of life is forming. Young faculty members move from idealistic perspectives to bureaucratic ones. These conclusions for non-tenured faculty shed light onto the attitudes and beliefs of tenured faculty.

Adjunct Faculty

There are many issues related to part-time faculty. The basic constraints that emerge are concerned with economics, selection, evaluation, and working conditions. Throughout the last decades of the 1900s, numerous studies focused attention on these issues. Few higher education institutions have systematic organizational procedures for utilizing part-time faculty. The result questions the integrity this creates in the classroom.

Marchese (1986) talked about the vision of education and teaching in colleges. Many institutions were more concerned with credentialing the students. Vision toward improving the undergraduate experience was low. Administrators must give higher status to teaching. Colleges using a majority of adjunct faculty reinforce the belief that anyone can teach and that lowers the status of teaching. The only way to improve the undergraduate experience is to value teaching.

The reason there are more part-time positions in higher education is the converting of tenure track positions to part-time after senior faculty members retire. This allows for a reduction in force while accommodating a shrinking budget. This strategy is to provide more budget flexibility, and this has developed a life of its own during the last few years. Administrators claim this is to allow for more flexibility in departments. The reality is that many departments are being asked to accomplish more with fewer full-time faculty to complete the job.

In addition to fiscal reasons for more part-time faculty, the question arises as to who selects the part-time faculty and whether the required qualifications of adjuncts are the same as when full-time faculty are selected. Many part-time faculty members are selected during the last month before school resumes or even after classes have begun. This last minute selection does not allow time for the instructor to adequately prepare for the course.

Conclusions

The academic culture in higher education encompasses the faculty's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions for the interaction of teaching and learning behaviors of an institution. Emphasis on teaching and learning were measured by how faculty members perceive administrative support. In an interview, Ernest Boyer stated, "if we want to improve the undergraduate experience, we must give higher status to teaching" (quoted in Marchese, 1986). The time has arrived for colleges to place greater emphasis on teaching.

Hiring more part-time faculty is not the way to make students feel that teaching is being emphasized. Adjunct faculty members have little internal motivation to learn how to teach or the motivation to improve their teaching strategies. Faculty need to continue or begin taking an active role in educating students by serving as a catalyst in order to promote the actualizing of a student's mind.

The academic culture along with the beliefs, values, and expectations of education influence professors' teaching skills and teaching approaches. It is time for colleges to decide what and how they want teaching at their colleges to be viewed by society, and to let the students know what type of teaching approaches will be used, realizing that faculty may say, "It is my academic freedom to approach teaching any way I choose." Faculty need to remember and to be reminded that students have a right to a learning environment where they feel most comfortable; one that will help them to achieve their goal of a quality education. Education is now an expensive product; the consumer–the student–should have a right to decide what it is he or she wants to purchase.

Quality in undergraduate education depends greatly on giving careful attention to instructional planning and the implementation of the subject matter. It is often assumed that an expert in a content area has teaching competencies. If the role of the professor is to be altered in our changing society, then it is important to see that full-time and part-time faculty keep the integrity in the classroom.

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Employee Services: The Artists Formerly Known as "HR"

Ann M. Valentine
Barbara Henken

Gateway Technical College is a two-year college serving southeastern Wisconsin. The college has a head-count enrollment of more than 30,000 students and employs approximately 600 full-time and permanent part-time employees, along with a number of adjunct faculty members each semester. As part of a college-wide decision to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace, the human resources function was chosen to pilot a new model of quality and cultural change for the college.

During the past two years, Gateway human resources employees have actively worked toward the development of a service-oriented culture, supported by service indices, ongoing training and development, and reallocation of resources.

Setting Goals and a Vision: What Do We Want to Achieve?

The college board of trustees committed the college to leadership in keeping the college competitive in an increasingly aggressive education and training marketplace. Although the human resources department was "getting by," the unit was not leading the college in quality improvement or assisting in building a culture of customer service. With a new vice president for human resources came the opportunity to thoroughly assess the status of the unit and make substantive changes.

The underlying issue in this change commitment has been a concerted effort to improve the general operating culture at Gateway. The culture at Gateway had become steeped in long-standing procedures and policies that did not support a positive working climate. Therefore, the first step in the change process was to commit to some basic operating principles as we began to plan a strategy:

- Create a human resources unit that operates in concert with the college vision and mission statements.
- Support the president's commitment to keep the college competitive.
- Learn to communicate with others and ourselves in the college in a productive, positive manner.
- Recruit, select, and train the best employees!
- Create positive images, heroes, and stories–you can manage your college culture or it can manage you.
- Streamline and clarify policies, procedures, and practices.

Launching an Audit: What Is the Status Quo?

With the aid of a consultant, Gateway conducted a thorough audit of the human resources functions, processes, policies, and outputs. Every member of the unit was involved through interviews and group planning sessions. Each unit employee took part in providing the consultant with information and worksheets. It should be noted that although Gateway chose to retain a consultant from private industry, an institutional researcher or other neutral member of the institution's staff could also take these steps.

The purpose of the audit was to evaluate the services that the human resources unit provided to internal and external customers, assess the effect that the services had on other working units of the college, and drive the design of a strategy to improve practices and service levels. At Gateway, the audit included the major functions performed by the human resources unit:

- Departmental organization
- Personnel policies and procedures
- Payroll and employee benefits
- Recruitment and employment
- Certification and compliance with state and federal requirements
- Training and development
- Employee communications
- Labor relations (three union groups and exempt employees)
- Safety, health, and wellness

Business Planning and Creating a Strategy: Where Do We Want to Go?

As can be clearly seen from the list of functions above, the human resources unit at Gateway is comprehensive, with a robust set of responsibilities. As a result of the audit process, each human resources employee more fully understood the role of the unit; had helped to identify service standards; assisted in creating the unit vision, mission, and goals; and began to communicate significant changes in the unit.

The new employee services unit collectively determined its mission, purpose, principles, and goals statements, part of which are noted below.

- **Mission**
  - It is the mission of Employee Services to actively contribute to a positive environment for all employees while serving as a college-wide model of quality.
- **Principles**
  - We recognize that employees are our most valued resource, and that employee satisfaction is the key to college-wide success.
  - We consistently strive to deliver excellent service to both our internal and external customers.
- **Goals**
  - Attract, recruit, and retain a qualified and diverse workforce to support the delivery of education, training, and services to students.
  - Maintain a flexible and positive approach in response to the changing needs of students, employers, and communities.
  - Define and employ continuous process improvement strategies and practices that will allow us to be proactive in meeting the needs of employers.
  - Support a culture of service excellence and employee satisfaction while acting as a resource/liaison.
  - Contribute to employee success by maintaining an environment that encourages employees to reach their maximum potential by providing ongoing training and staff development.
  - Maintain a high level of integrity in compliance with district policies and standard practices; and state and federal laws, guidelines, rules, and regulations.

From this work, the unit was ready to launch a business plan and strategy that included timelines, objectives, and milestones.

A first important change was to rename the unit from "Human Resources" to "Employee Services." More than just a symbolic change, the new unit name denotes a departure from traditional thinking about human resources work and emphasizes a move toward a more dynamic, effective, and supportive organization. By reallocating resources, the unit was reorganized to place responsibilities in a more efficient workflow and also to add two new positions to a severely understaffed unit.

One of the new positions is employee training and development coordinator, whose job is to help the college move toward individualized training and development plans for each and every employee of the college. For many employees, the performance evaluation process has been revised to include a multi-step communication process, including personal and professional goals. A person rated as deficient in any performance category is referred to the training coordinator for assistance in developing an improvement plan. Through organized change, Employee Services has made steady, if incomplete, progress toward our goals.

Measurements and Progress: How Are We Doing?

While there is still a long way to go before the college can consider its culture to have changed, there has been a good deal of progress. Service indices have been implemented in the payroll and part-time contracts areas that are helping Employee Services pinpoint areas for improvement. For example, while electronic timesheets and part-time contracts are in development, the unit has implemented time and date stamps as paperwork flows to completion. In addition, Employee Services maintains an online record of files that have not been completed and the reasons why. Through this vehicle, secretaries and deans are able to check on the status of new and part-time employees to determine what role they should play in completing the files for new employees.

In addition to improving the processes behind the scenes, Employee Services leaders have taken consistent steps to communicate standards and assist district-wide employees in facilitating streamlined processes. A payroll committee has been implemented to bring together district deans, secretaries, and database managers to resolve issues and improve practices. The Employee Services unit also travels to the three campuses in the district to provide "house calls," upbeat training and workshop sessions to assist secretaries with forms and in understanding federal and state documentation requirements.

An ongoing training curriculum is being provided for all managers and supervisors at the college to create equitable and consistent practices across the district. All managers and supervisors are required to attend these sessions, which then have an impact on their performance evaluations. At the end of the third year of this program, managers and supervisors who have not completed all training sessions will no longer be qualified to receive merit pay increases. The support of the president and the president's advisory council (vice presidents and provosts) has been very important to the success of this program, which will eventually serve as a model for all employee groups.

Recommendations and Ongoing Considerations

Gateway has begun the process of major cultural change at our college, but we still have a long road ahead. Some of the clear lessons we have learned help us to stay the course and work on continual improvement:

- **Clarify and reclarify your goals.** Set your direction early and in concert with the institutional mission and vision statements. Frequently remind yourself and others of your goals and the improvements that have already been made.
- **Cultivate support.** The support of the president/CEO, the board, and other top administrators at the college is important to your success and will help diffuse support throughout the college.
- **Thoroughly and honestly assess current practices.** Be willing to admit flaws and assist employees in dealing with changes. Cultural change is not always accepted; recognize the extremely important role that the human resources unit plays in determining the institutional culture while providing ongoing support.
- **Seek legal counsel early on** when implementing major overhauls in administrative practices, policies, and rules. Legal counsel will help you to manage change in a way that is compatible with bargaining agreements and legal requirements.
- **Monitor both successes and hiccups along the way.** Seek to repair the hiccups, and help your team celebrate the successes. Encouragement at all levels improves chances for overall success.

- **Maintain realistic expectations.** Major cultural change will take time and will not necessarily proceed smoothly, but be prepared to stay the course.

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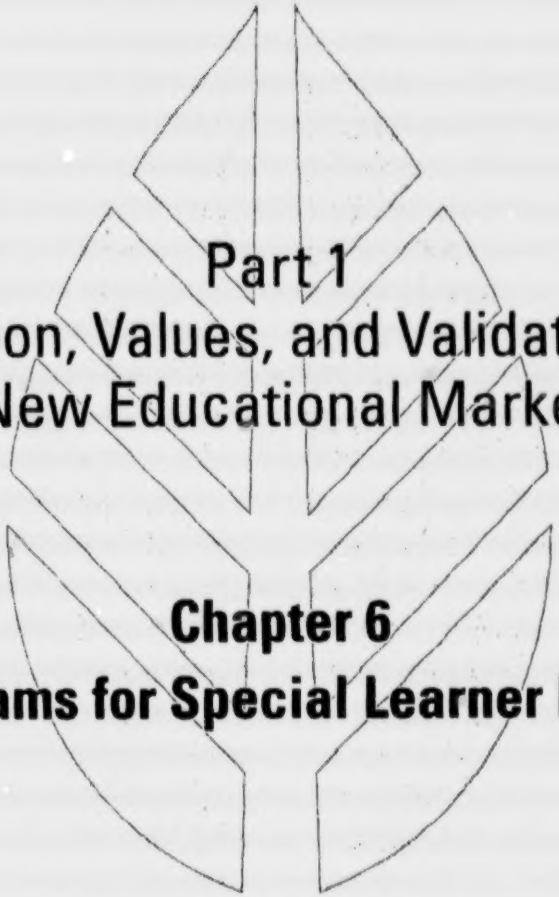

Part 1
Vision, Values, and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace

Chapter 6
Programs for Special Learner Needs

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
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PEPNet–Postsecondary Education Programs Network: A Successful Collaboration Regionally / Nationally

Raymond C. Olson
Denise Kavin

In the early 1950s, only a small minority of deaf and hard of hearing students had access to postsecondary education programs that could meet their unique communication needs. At that time, Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., the world's only liberal arts college for the deaf, had an enrollment of just three hundred students. There were a handful of additional deaf students attending other programs in the nation, but not necessarily with specialized support services such as sign language interpreting and note-taking, the most commonly identified types of support services for such students.

During recent years, postsecondary educational opportunities for people who are deaf and hard of hearing have been expanding on college campuses across America. More programs are becoming accessible, and the number of such students enrolling in them is steadily increasing. "During the 1970's, the number of postsecondary programs for deaf students in the United States grew rapidly. Community colleges and special postsecondary programs began to take on increasing numbers of deaf students. A growing concern among professionals in organizations serving deaf people regarding unemployment and underemployment led to federal legislation to ameliorate the problem." (Lang and Connor 1988, 26). Legislation called for federal support of four regional postsecondary programs for deaf and hard of hearing students, housed at already-established higher education institutions.

The purpose of establishing these programs was to demonstrate the feasibility of setting up model programs for deaf and hard of hearing students at existing postsecondary programs for the mainstream population (Moores, 1979, 15). These programs were initially supported by federal funds from special education funding designed for students with disabilities and later by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In the 1992–1993 academic year, there were an estimated 20,040 deaf and hard of hearing students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions nationwide, including an additional 2,500 enrolled at Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (Lewis, Farris, and Greene 1994, iii). The 1999 edition of *College and Career Programs for Deaf Students*, Tenth Edition, lists two national programs and more than 145 postsecondary programs, which shows an explosion of postsecondary programs for deaf and hard of hearing students. "Prospects for deaf people are considerably different than 20–30 years ago. Postsecondary education for the deaf is beginning to mature" (Nash 1988, 9). With this increase has also come improved access and accommodations in postsecondary programs for such students.

As a result of federal legislation that shifted the focus of funding from direct service programs for deaf and hard of hearing students to outreach and training at the institutional level, the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) was formed in 1996 to create effective and efficient technical assistance services to postsecondary educational institutions in providing access and accommodations to such individuals. Colleges were ultimately responsible for the provision of support services to deaf and hard of hearing students; they could no longer depend on federal funding to provide accommodations.

The purpose of PEPNet is to promote improved access and availability of postsecondary educational opportunities for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is designed to facilitate more equality, consistency, and uniformity in quality of support services.

The four regional technical assistance centers of PEPNet are:

1. Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach, St. Paul Technical College, St. Paul, Minnesota (MCPO)
2. Northeast Technical Assistance Center, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York (NETAC)
3. Postsecondary Education Consortium, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee (PEC)
4. Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia, National Center on Deafness, California State University, Northridge, California (WROCC)

The four centers were created to ensure that every postsecondary institution in the United States could easily access the technical assistance and outreach services that the centers provide. PEPNet, the Postsecondary Education Programs Network, is the national collaboration of the four Regional Postsecondary Education Centers for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Through PEPNet, the four centers strive to provide coordinated services to the nation's more than 10,000 postsecondary institutions, which include community-based rehabilitation centers, proprietary schools, and two- and four-year colleges and universities.

While all four programs have different technical assistance delivery structures, the mission for all programs is the same: to increase and improve postsecondary educational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing students through technical assistance services. MCPO offers consultation and training on services for deaf and hard of hearing students, presentations at workshops and conferences, and access to a network of other professionals in the field of higher education and deafness. Issues that can be addressed include, but are not limited to: interpreting services, note-taking, tutoring, real-time captioning and C-print, legal obligations required under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and teaching English as a second language to deaf and hard of hearing students. MCPO accomplishes its work through the funding of five outreach sites: Harper College in Palatine, Illinois; the Center for Sight and Hearing in Rockford, Illinois; the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Columbus State Community College in Columbus, Ohio; and St. Paul Technical College-MCPO in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In addition to technical assistance, consultation, and training services, PEPNet also offers teleconferences, online training modules, and regional and national conferences. PEPNet also has a resource center housed at WROCC; which offers a wealth of products including training packages, handbooks, books and booklets, tip sheets, videotapes, and curricula.

Use of the Internet has opened distance learning, which has enhanced and broadened the scope of PEPNet and the regional centers' training capacity. Initially, an online training and staff development module was developed to provide awareness of deafness and the educational needs of both deaf and hard of hearing individuals. This online training has been very successful as a wide variety of professionals in postsecondary settings have completed the module and received the certificate that is printed automatically when the participant completes the training successfully. The second online training module has just been released, and it serves to address the transition needs of deaf and hard of hearing secondary students who are seeking postsecondary training. Entitled "Gates to Adventure," it takes the participants through a series of events that instruct as well as evaluate the potential the participants have to enter fields of study at the postsecondary level. Demonstrations and presentations of this new online training have opened the possibility of the module to be used not only for deaf and hard of hearing students, but also for hearing peers.

Next, the Internet provided a way to capture the technical assistance available through the outreach sites in the Midwest region by allowing them to report their activities on a database via the Web. This provided a way to evaluate the outcomes of our project and make the federal reports timely and more accurate. Since the success of this adventure became known, two more of the regions have come to adopt the database collection process. At this time we are close to having all data collected and reported to the federal grants officer using the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) format. This provides closer monitoring of activities and allows us to address gaps in our delivery within the twelve states of the Midwest region as well as nationwide.

Deaf and hard of hearing students in postsecondary education meet many challenges to get access to training. Unlike their experiences in K-12 settings, no system was set to deliver accommodations and access support in the postsecondary setting. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides local school systems with funding and support to serve students with disabilities. Postsecondary education has used several sources to provide these services, and all of them have changed, or in many cases vanished, because of changes in policies. Recently, two resources used in the past have changed drastically—namely the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services and the Perkins Vocational Education funding. VR has withdrawn funding for accommodations in several states and this effort has expanded to more states. Perkins funding has changed from set-asides, to special populations funding, to presently non-required funding, with curriculum services and collaboration with K-12 taking major funding levels. These funding changes added new challenges to those that deaf and hard of hearing individuals face as they try to access postsecondary training.

Hearing loss is a low-incidence disability that appears inconsistently on the postsecondary education scene, and when students do enroll the cost of accommodation can be challenging for budgets within the college setting. This cost competes with other program costs and creates an environment that is at times not friendly to deaf and hard of hearing students when they are the cause of budget shifts to accommodate. Added to this dilemma is the variety of needs that each individual may require. Some deaf people have difficulties with English literacy because they have not heard the language or because they have heard it only in a limited way (Holcomb 1993). Since English is not their first language, and because it is a spoken language dependent on hearing, deaf and hard of hearing individuals find English difficult to master. The rules of the English language for deaf students must be remembered solely by rules of the language regarding sentence structure and verb usage. Hearing individuals rely on both the written rules and the spoken sounds of grammar and verb usage. Therefore students may require American Sign Language interpreting, manually coded English interpreting, captioning, note-taking, or instructional support services. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has provided some strong legal support for deaf and hard of hearing students; yet it has served to challenge administrations at colleges and universities to come up with some sizable budgets to meet needs of small numbers of students. This has recently served to disengage colleges and universities in their recruiting efforts to get deaf students to matriculate. This has then challenged the Technical Assistance Centers to come up with ways to address the reluctant attitudes of college administrations. Several states and areas of the country have utilized consortia to meet the changing costs related to the low-incidence deaf and hard of hearing student populations.

The National PEPNet Conference will take place on April 10-13 at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri. The program and breakout sessions will be informative and beneficial to disability coordinators and administrators from colleges and universities. Also, the Postsecondary Interpreter Network (PIN) will have a conference in 2003, and interested individuals should check our Web site <www.pepnet.org> for more details as well as other information for serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

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Placing Adult Learners in Twenty-First Century Perspective: Institutional Models and Lessons Learned

Lee Bash

Background

Entering the twenty-first century, colleges and universities may be facing their greatest challenge as they are called upon to respond to the needs of a society in the midst of dramatic transformation. Corporate and for-profit universities serve as a rapidly expanding set of new competitors, compounded by a greater range of learning opportunities that include numerous permutations of distance learning and greater responsiveness to a diverse set of new constituents. Competition for students has become fierce when compared to practices just a few short years ago. Arguably, it is the adult learner, now comprising more than 45 percent of all students enrolled in higher education in the United States, who serves as a catalyst for many of the factors in this phenomenon.

State of the Academy

Currently, the Academy is undergoing a change of culture that permeates its every fiber. Since higher education has seldom been characterized by change during the past four hundred years, the Academy now faces many profound challenges that cut to the very core of its traditions and common practices.

But some visionary educational leaders have begun speaking to the remarkable issues that now confront the Academy. In his keynote address last year, Steven Crow, Executive Director of The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, noted that "Our colleges and universities are so unaccustomed to entrepreneurialism, responsiveness, and creative collaboration that they do not always do a good job at any of them" (Crow 2001, 8).

Yet most of these institutions have units devoted to adult learning that have been performing with success for decades, especially when it comes to creative collaboration, responsiveness, and entrepreneurialism. Therefore, the Academy might do well to seek out benchmark adult learning programs to identify those aspects and practices that may help serve as models for success in the twenty-first century.

Institutional Models

In its recent report to the Board of Trustees of The Higher Learning Commission, the Task Force on Adult Degree Completion Programs and the Award of Credit for Prior Learning at the Baccalaureate Level noted: "Adult degree completion programs have become increasingly relevant within the higher education community and they are growing at a rapid pace across the nation." Although the remainder of their report primarily focuses on the role and exemplary practices of adult learning programs within the context of the institution, a few observations at the conclusion expand to a more comprehensive perspective directed toward institutions. "Lifelong learning is not a catch-phrase or a fad but rather a trend that marks a significant change in the behavior of increasing numbers of adults who have come to value the need for continuous learning.... Each institution must decide the scope of the business it is in, and plan and operate accordingly."

While the task force is to be commended for its efforts, practitioners in adult learning programs are likely to respond that these observations have long been encompassed in the best practices and guiding principles of model adult learning programs. Indeed, taking a lead from the comments previously attributed to Steve Crow, individuals who work with adult learners are likely to conclude that his comments about institutions have already resonated with adult learning programs for some time. And when he continues

> But there is a new culture emerging within higher education. It is one in which the learning of students is central; it is one in which hierarchical structures give way to collaborative teamwork; it is one in which institutional boundaries blur when cooperation and collaboration provide better service to students; it is one in which success is measured by the achievement of clearly defined goals; and it is one that continues to hold as fundamental a commitment to unfettered intellectual inquiry and academic freedom (Crow 2001, 8).

These same individuals will quickly recognize that this description is consistent with established best practices and benchmarks that have defined adult programs during the past few years.

Adult Programs Leading the Way

Although managing institutional change in higher education may be one of the greater challenges of the twenty-first century, adult learning programs have been relying upon organic or kaleidoscopic change to define many of their initiatives for more than twenty years. In fact, their survival has often relied upon their creativity, flexibility, and capacity to listen carefully before responding with what their constituents are seeking. In other words, they have evolved through entrepreneurial strategies, initiatives, and thinking. To cite a few examples:

- Many adult programs serve as the primary residence or center for various forms of distance learning initiatives.
- Lifelong learning has begun to take on greater significance as adult programs seek to expand their constituencies in all directions.
- The delivery of courses has often expanded to "anywhere, anytime" in an effort to respond to new lifestyles.
- The format of these courses has likewise extended to a full gamut of options, from highly compressed and intense, to extending beyond the conventional semester.
- Perhaps the most extreme example of such initiatives resides within those courses that are asynchronous.
- Many programs are based upon partnerships and collaborations that might have seemed far-fetched until recently.

Conclusion

As the Academy seeks solutions to the dramatic changes it will inevitably be called upon to make in the new century, it may or may not seek adult learning programs to serve as models. But there are many examples of how these programs have already provided solid alternatives to the status quo, and the lessons learned are at least worthy of further consideration.

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Creating a Center for the Assessment of Experiential Learning

Tom A. Flint
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The Case for Action in Minnesota

Now more than ever, access to learning determines the capacity of a state to expand and enhance economic development and civic participation. Like many states, Minnesota has an admirable record of access to higher education, particularly through its state university system. However, too many working men and women are still unable to access higher learning. Conflicting demands on their time and barriers of institutional incompatibilities remain formidable obstacles. A major barrier has been the incomplete translation of learning gained in the workplace to the academic setting of the university. While considerable training takes place in the workplace, particularly among larger employers, this training, for the most part, is not recognized for academic credit or advanced standing in university settings.

In addition to the problem of access to higher education, there is a serious problem for adults who are not yet prepared for doing academic work at the higher education level, but who must progress eventually to advanced levels of education in university degree programs. Again, the problem is due in large part to the lack of accurate recognized assessment of learning accomplishments and learning needs that can then be recognized and addressed by all institutions of higher learning.

Key to improving the recognition of learning acquired at work or through independent study is assessment. Up to now, the process of accessing skills and knowledge has been limited to individuals seeking admission to particular programs or courses. No sustained and efficient program of assessment of prior learning exists across the state university system. Moreover, few programs assess the extent of learning that takes place at the workplace in targeted domains or industries.

The Center for Experiential Learning Assessment of First College in Metropolitan State University is one unit that is developing the capacity to address these needs. Metropolitan State University, in partnership with CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning), proposes to expand the Center for Experiential Learning Assessment (CELA) currently housed in First College into the Minnesota Center for Experiential Learning Assessment (MnCELA). The center's purposes will include the following:

- ○ expand opportunities to employers and students to earn college or university credit for learning that occurs outside the traditional college classroom;
- ○ provide an efficient, consistent, and effective system of assessing non-classroom learning for credit; and
- ○ enhance statewide efficiency of the workforce by increasing the amount of work-based and independent learning that is recognized for academic credit.

The specific goals of the center are to:

- ○ expand the capacity of First College, Metropolitan State University, and the Minnesota State University system to serve the Minnesota workforce through the assessment of prior experiential learning;

- significantly enhance the quality of assessment of learning outside the classroom throughout the system;
- develop and enhance faculty skills and knowledge about prior learning and its assessment;
- build relationships with employers, agencies, and trade/professional groups within the state that provide training and education programs, so that there can be a more efficient translation of learning achieved at work, leading to recognized academic credit and credentials.

Academic Rationale for the Center

Adults learn in a variety of places and in a variety of ways. Not only is learning in the workplace an increasingly common part of most jobs, learning at home and learning on the World Wide Web are growing phenomena. In addition, the demand for more educated workers has caused many employers to look to educational institutions to provide both new and different leaning opportunities for their employees. As a result, both employers and their employees seek recognition and academic credit for the significant learning that they have attained through alternative means. For the employee, such recognition can mean enhanced employability. For the employer, the assessment of learning can result in cost savings. For colleges and universities, the ability to assess accurately and efficiently the knowledge and skills of potential students can enhance their operating effectiveness and increase their ability to produce educated, degree-holding graduates in less time.

The modern workplace has caused a shift in the traditional relationships between adult workers, their employers, and postsecondary institutions. This has resulted in a need for wider recognition and use of the assessment of experiential learning, or Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). Rising employability requirements have led increasing numbers of adult learners to enroll in postsecondary institutions. Adult learners often possess knowledge and skill acquired outside of the college classroom. They need and expect recognition of this learning so that they do not waste their time and resources taking classes to develop skills that they have already mastered and that delay their receipt of a degree, certificate, or license. Employers share the need for greater recognition of experiential learning by postsecondary institutions. They expect institutions to recognize the validity and substance of their training programs by granting appropriate credit for them, thereby enabling their employees to more quickly upgrade their skills and employability. Finally, as adult learners become a larger proportion of the student population, it is no longer enough to provide services designed for the traditional college student population. Postsecondary institutions will need to provide services to attract adult learners.

Although PLA has been a recognized method of evaluating and awarding credit since the late 1970s, and despite the evident need for such programs, PLA programs are not yet widely available or standardized. Of the approximately 1,000 institutions that reported having PLA programs in a 1996 CAEL survey, many offer only limited programs that include standardized tests or course challenge exams. Developing expertise in such PLA methods as performance tests, simulations, essay exams, objective written exam, interviews, and self-assessment requires a long-term financial and intellectual commitment on the part of the institution and its faculty. Further complicating the process is that, in many cases, institutions face considerable faculty resistance to the development of these programs. Therefore, since many postsecondary institutions face rising enrollments of adult learners and greater need on the part of adult learners and their employers for PLA programs, they need resources and faculty support to develop these programs.

The Partnership of CAEL and Metropolitan State University

CAEL is the worldwide pioneer and standard-bearer for PLA. Since CAEL's founding in 1974, it has trained thousands of faculty and administrators in the methods and theory of assessment of learning that occurs outside the classroom. In 1980 CAEL developed and disseminated the CAEL standards for the assessment of prior learning (see below). These standards have become the "gold standard" for PLA programs across the country and internationally. Today CAEL offers a variety of means for individuals and institutions to acquire and enhance programs and skills in the assessment of prior learning. CAEL has also partnered with many institutions in the development of powerful systems of assessment that have served the growing demand from adult learners for recognition of the training and education they have received at work and at home.

Together with First College, CAEL will develop the plan and at least three initial pilot projects for the expanded use of Prior Learning Assessment within Metropolitan State University and beyond. This partnership then will provide both the traditional role of First College as a unit serving adult learners and the expertise that CAEL brings from more than twenty-five years of research and training in the field.

Evaluating Employer-Sponsored Instructional Programs: Critical Issues

Acceptance of the center's activities will hinge upon the quality and rigor of its review processes. In formulating its review process parameters, the center must determine:

- Who is qualified to evaluate programs.
- How particular evaluators are assigned to prospective eligible programs needing such evaluation.
- How many qualified assessors must evaluate a program.
- Where program evaluations will take place.
- What material is acceptable or not acceptable for the purposes of making program evaluations (mandatory to include and to exclude from consideration).
- How credit levels are to be determined (numbers of credits per program evaluated).
- Whether eligible programs as formulated by their sponsors shall be "split" into component pieces for credit evaluation purposes; alternatively, when multiple eligible programs should be "combined" for credit evaluation purposes.
- The duration of its credit recommendations for eligible courses (whether there shall be a "natural" expiration that may trigger a reevaluation).
- What changes, if any, in an eligible program must "trigger" a reevaluation; if so, what similarities or differences to the original evaluation process will occur.

Essential Principles of PLA

Since 1974 CAEL has been the international leader in research and advocacy for principles of good practice in the assessment of learning for credit. Each of the major regional accrediting commissions provides guidance to institutions of higher education through the standards of quality assurance originally articulated by CAEL. In the North Central region, The Higher Learning Commission endorsed CAEL-inspired principles governing prior learning assessment in June 2000, in a trustee task force report on adult degree completion programs.

The CAEL principles that shall guide the outcomes of the Prior Learning Assessment processes are:

The Assessment Process

I. Credit should be awarded only for **learning,** and not for **experience.**
II. Credit should be awarded only for learning at the level of **higher education.**
III. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
IV. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
V. Credit awarded should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

Administrative Context in Which the Assessment and Credit Award Occur

VI. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
VII. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
VIII. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
IX. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.
X. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

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To Learn More About the Center

During the presentation at the Annual Meeting, the session facilitators will describe this initiative in greater detail, including the key concepts for Prior Learning Assessment and its relevance to adult learning and employer partnerships. We will connect the components of this project to the mission of The Higher Learning Commission, promoting and preserving quality through the accreditation process for higher education institutions. The presenters will discuss the context, progress of the current project, and lessons learned. This session is directed to anyone at an institution that serves significant numbers of adult learners.

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A Model Bi-directional Integrated International Exchange Program for Engineering or Business

Owe Petersen
Larry Schmedeman
Hermann Viets
Rudolph Taurit

The Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) has partnered with the Fachhochschule Lübeck (FHL), University of Applied Sciences, Lübeck, Germany, to establish two unique bi-directional international student exchange programs that are totally integrated into the curricula of both institutions. The programs are in the disciplines of electrical engineering and business and address two vital needs of industry: educating graduates who possess a technical/business competency and developing graduates with a global perspective.

Graduates of all institutions and degree programs face an increased level of globalization. Hence, they must develop a greater awareness and familiarity of the larger world they will be expected to operate in and adjust to. It is highly probable that it will be the norm for both our engineering and business graduates to have direct interaction with their counterparts in foreign lands. With companies producing for the global marketplace and engaged in global manufacturing, outsourcing, and partnering, it is also probable that our graduates will be employed by a division of an international company, travel routinely to company divisions in foreign lands, or even be employed abroad. Increasingly, the nationality of some companies is difficult to discern. Hence, knowledge of other cultures and the ability to live and interact in other cultures will be viewed as an essential skill required for professional success.

Student exchange programs with foreign universities have been a traditional and reasonably successful response to this trend. These programs have taken on various forms. For example, home universities:

- serve as a gathering point for students from many sources, and place students in a university abroad, provided a language proficiency requirement has been met;
- operate their own facilities abroad, including faculty; or
- send students to a particular university abroad, but leave them on their own regarding curriculum matters.

However, following such traditional approaches often impacted a student's length of stay in an academic program, delayed graduation, or it was too limited in time and scope to result in the desired understanding of other cultures. Whatever the nature of the exchange program, some typical issues that must be addressed concern the effectiveness of the program, how readily students can participate, the cost of the program, required language skills, and delays toward graduation. The goals of the MSOE/FHL programs were to address these points in some reasonable manner and provide our students with a superior means of experiencing the richness of living in another culture.

Program Description

The key to the success of our international exchange programs is that MSOE students are not required to have any prior knowledge of German in order to participate. All the courses taken at the FHL are taught in English, except for the German language class. The second major factor is that participation in the programs does not add to the length of academic study required for graduation. Hence, the international programs were integrated into the normal curricula so that progress toward the desired degree is the same as for non-participating students. Another significant component of the program is that it provides the best aspects of an immersion-style program while in the company of fellow students from one's home institution. It is a telling characteristic of the program that not many MSOE students return home during holiday or semester breaks. Generally, they quickly develop a strong comfort level for living and studying abroad.

For the Fachhochschule Lübeck, it was important to afford their students the opportunity to earn a degree from a U.S. university, improve their mastery of English, and do their Diplom Arbeit (Diploma Project) in the United States. The degree would open up additional international employment and graduate school opportunities. The Diplom Arbeit is satisfied by a major design experience (engineering) and is normally completed in an industrial setting. The Diplom Arbeit for business has the same elements as the engineering project, but without the design component requirement. Some additional issues that needed to be worked out included the length of the experience; the selection of academic year in which it would take place; and program accreditation, which is of critical importance to an engineering program where all degree paths have to meet the EC2000 criteria.

During the first two academic years, students at MSOE and the FHL pursue the normal course of study at their home institution. This would constitute the *Grundstudium* (foundation studies) at the FHL. After completion of the first two years, both groups of students participating in the exchange program enter a virtually common curriculum for the *entire junior year* taught at the FHL (see Figure 1). For all participants in the international study program, the *junior year constitutes a joint MSOE/FHL academic year* since it is under the auspices of both institutions. As such, the FHL becomes an off-campus site for MSOE, and the academic content is determined and reviewed jointly by MSOE and the FHL.

Both groups of students complete their senior year at MSOE, although not in a common set of courses. Since the junior year at the FHL does not equate to the identical set of courses normally taken at MSOE, the MSOE students complete their remaining academic requirements, consisting of a mix of junior and senior year courses. The FHL students take a set of prescribed courses at MSOE to complete their FHL academic requirements. The FHL students also complete their Diplom Arbeit requirement while at MSOE.

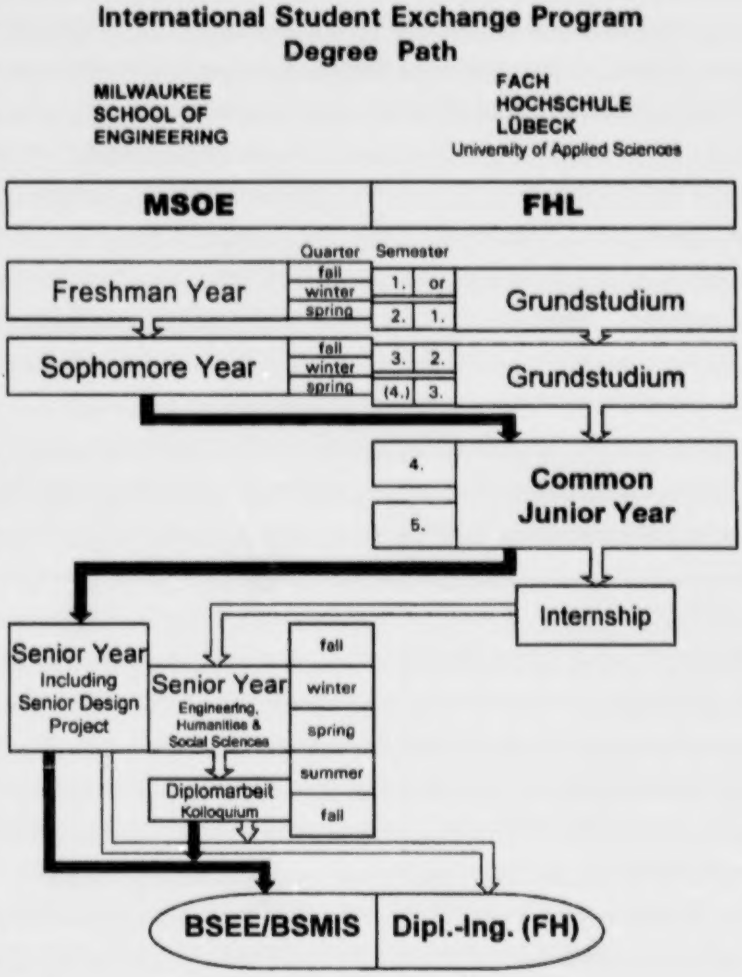
International Student Exchange Program
Degree Path
MILWAUKEE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
FACH HOCHSCHULE LÜBECK
University of Applied Sciences
MSOE
FHL
Quarter
Semester
Freshman Year
fall
winter
spring
1.
or
2.
1.
Grundstudium
Sophomore Year
fall
winter
spring
3.
2.
(4.)
3.
Grundstudium
4.
5.
Common Junior Year
Internship
Senior Year
Including Senior Design Project
Senior Year
Engineering, Humanities & Social Sciences
fall
winter
spring
summer
fall
Diplomarbeit
Kolloquium
BSEE/BSMIS
Dipl.-Ing. (FH)

Figure 1

All students are awarded degrees from both MSOE and the FHL upon the successful completion of all academic requirements. The B.S. in Electrical Engineering degree is awarded from MSOE and the Diplom Ingenieur (FH) degree from the FHL to those in the electrical engineering program. MSOE business students receive the B.S. in International Business from MSOE and the Diplom Wirtschaftsingenieur (Engineering and Business Management) from the FHL. The FHL business students receive a B.S. degree in Management Information Systems from MSOE and also the Diplom Wirtschaftsingenieur (Engineering and Business Management) from the FHL. The design of the bi-directional exchange program for both engineering and business acknowledges the strengths and uniqueness of the programs of each university and, hence, the different MSOE degrees for the business students. In the business area, the FHL has an emphasis in logistics, and the curriculum for MSOE business students studying in Germany included this. At MSOE the curricular focus for the FHL business students is in MIS.

Anecdotal comments suggest that for MSOE students the academic and cultural experience of living abroad is of greater importance than the FHL Diplom degree. On the other hand, the FHL students generally have already had extensive international experiences before coming to MSOE. For them, the MSOE degree opens significant career opportunities for employment on a second continent.

The English language skills of the FHL students are quite good upon coming to MSOE, and that is demonstrated by their success in the various classes, including three required courses in the humanities and social sciences. Their preparation for that success at MSOE is strongly aided by the common junior year, where the instruction is in English. The German academic program places a strong emphasis on the Diplom Arbeit project, which forms a major component of the FHL GPA. The outcomes for the Diplom Arbeit for FHL students studying at MSOE have been outstanding, as judged both by the academic advisors and the companies sponsoring the projects.

There are other universities that offer similar study abroad programs, programs that also provide dual degrees and don't delay graduation. But there is a key distinction: foreign language expertise is essential for participation. In a large university with foreign language departments, it may be possible to gather a sufficient number of participants from among the various liberal arts majors, but in a small university with limited foreign language offerings, the likelihood of finding students with the required language skills is substantially reduced.

The electrical engineering program has been in existence since 1994, with the number of participants typically being four to eight MSOE students and five to eight FHL students each year. Up to this point, all participants have completed the program successfully. The business program sent its inaugural group of participating students to the Fachhochschule Lübeck in the fall of 2000. To date, the Rader School of Business has sent an average of six students to and received ten students from the FHL each year.

The Institutions

Milwaukee School of Engineering is a small private university in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with a primary focus on engineering, business, and medically related programs. The Fachhochschule Lübeck is a government-supported University of Applied Sciences in the Bundesrepublik Deutschland with a primary focus on applied engineering, including a business-engineering program, and the natural sciences. Both institutions are primarily teaching institutions and because of their respective traditions are an extremely good match for each other.

The development and implementation of the exchange programs required a strong commitment and flexibility from both institutions for success. The FHL, in particular, was first required by law to gain permission from the relevant German government academic accrediting agencies to implement the exchange programs, and then the FHL converted the agreed-upon classes into English taught courses. Significant issues had to be addressed regarding grade conversion between the German and U.S. systems, transcript entries, mapping of the curriculum between institutions of courses taken, and assessment processes (primarily engineering).

Institutional Challenges

There are a number of "side" issues that must be resolved for a successful international exchange program. Among those issues are the following:

- Tuition is potentially a major complication when the exchange relationship involves a private university and a state institution where there is a significant student tuition subsidy. For our situation, this was simplified by choosing to have the students pay tuition to the home institution, regardless of where the student attends. There is no monetary exchange between institutions. The expectations are that the number of students going both ways will have a reasonable balance in numbers over the long run. This seems to be working to everyone's satisfaction.
- Some things simply take time. Learning about other cultures is one of those things. Studying and living in another country for an entire academic year allows a person to evolve from being a tourist to being somewhat of a "native." The adjustment is far more mental than it is physical. As a minimum, one must do what the "locals" do for an extended period of time in order to be able to see the value of what is being done and how and why it is done.

- ◇ The assigned grades in the German educational system differ significantly from those in a typical American system. Specifically, the FHL issues numerical grades with a larger number of possible outcomes in comparison to the MSOE scale of letter grades. It was necessary to map grades between the two institutions in a manner that would be fair for students going in either direction of the exchange program.
- ◇ Transcript information detailing the course work of the exchange program is of considerable importance to potential employers, graduate schools, and any accreditation process. The junior year at the FHL is listed on the MSOE transcript in the form of equivalent MSOE courses and is included in all GPA calculations. The inclusion into the GPA uses the FHL credits as a block of credits since it is not possible to transform grades for individual FHL courses into meaningful MSOE grades. For example, often an equivalent MSOE course is satisfied by parts of multiple FHL courses.

Conclusions

The Milwaukee School of Engineering and the Fachhochschule Lübeck have developed and implemented a student exchange program that is integrated into the normal curricula of both institutions. The main practical results of the program are that MSOE students gain a broad and unique international understanding in addition to the academic advancement of their junior year abroad. The cross-cultural experience provides the global perspective needed for leadership positions in management and business.

The FHL students gain an academic degree that permits ready employment in U.S. industry and opportunity for entry into U.S. graduate programs. For all students, the international program provides an integrated approach to education that enhances an understanding of and need for a philosophy of life-long learning.

Acknowledgement

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Maintaining Institutional Integrity While Operating an International Branch Campus: Linking Institutional Mission, Values, and Accountability

James Baker
William Cheek
Dennis Lancaster

Introduction

On June 21, 2000, the Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) Board of Governors approved a resolution allowing the four campuses of the SMSU System (SMSU-Springfield, SMSU-Mountain Grove, SMSU-West Plains, and the SMSU Virtual Campus) to enter into an agreement with Liaoning Teachers University establishing the Southwest Missouri State University Branch Campus at Liaoning Teachers (LTU) University in Dalian, People's Republic of China. As a part of that agreement, the president of the SMSU system authorized SMSU-West Plains (a two-year, open admissions campus in the SMSU system, separately accredited by The Higher Learning Commission) to provide an Associate of Arts Degree in General Studies (with an emphasis in business) at the branch campus in Dalian.

During its first year of operation, the branch campus enrolled 81 students. That number had increased to 130 by the second year. The long-range plan for the campus is to enroll up to 300 students per year. The partnership between Southwest Missouri State University and Liaoning Teachers University is designed to lead to a cultural exchange between the two universities, foster collaborative research and Internet-based graduate education opportunities, and promote understanding and friendship between the two countries. Through the branch campus, after final Commission approval for institutional change, Chinese students will be able to complete an associate degree offered by SMSU-West Plains. After obtaining the associate of arts degree from the branch campus, students may seek employment in China, continue their education at a Chinese university, or come to the United States and attend SMSU or another university.

Thus far, the partnership between SMSU and LTU has proven successful. During October 2001, SMSU-West Plains hosted a site visit by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. The site visit was in response to the request for institutional change submitted by SMSU-West Plains to The Higher Learning Commission seeking approval to offer the associate degree program. The site visit team recommended, without stipulations, approval for institutional change to offer the degree at the branch campus. The site team report indicated that the program in China is innovative, visionary, imaginative, and courageous; that the program is based on the long-range plans and goals of both the SMSU system and SMSU-West Plains; and that the financial plan for the branch campus is sound.

This paper describes how Southwest Missouri State University entered into the highly competitive and complex international education marketplace and established a two-year branch campus in China. The experience of the university in linking its vision, its mission, and its long-range plan, coupled with a strong assessment plan to ensure a successful branch campus while maintaining institutional integrity and accountability, is discussed.

Higher Education in the International Marketplace

Globalization of the professions and economic globalization are key drivers leading to the globalization of higher education. (Baker 2000) Higher education in the United States has traditionally focused on international programs as a means of cultural enrichment for students and faculty. However, higher education institutions are increasingly emphasizing development of graduates capable of working in the global economy and living in the global community. At SMSU, an awareness of global issues is a crucial part of what the university defines as an educated person. The university actively recruits international students to come to the United States and at the same time provides opportunities and encourages its students to study abroad.

According to U.S. Department of Education Secretary Rod Paige (2001), it is crucial for the peoples of the world to learn to understand one another's cultures, languages, and beliefs. He believes that to succeed in the global environment, students need to complement their academic and career learning with the international skills that will allow them to understand and work with people from other countries.

Educating international students at American colleges and universities is a major activity. In its report *Open Doors 2000*, the Institute for International Education (IIE) stated that international students made up 3.2 percent of the total student body enrolled in U.S. institutions in 1997, up from 2.8 percent in 1990. In 1998–1999, according to that same report, there were 491,000 foreign students studying in the United States. Fifty-six percent of those students were from Asian countries, 51,000 from China alone. International education is a large business in the United States, contributing over $12 billion to the U.S. economy through tuition, living expenses, and other related costs.

While American universities have been able to attract students from around the world, the number of Americans studying abroad is much smaller. The Institute for International Education (2001) reported that in 1998–1999 roughly 130,000 American students studied abroad, a 14 percent increase from the previous year. However, the American Council on Education (2000) issued a report indicating that the number of American students abroad is actually quite low. Further, the report documents a decline in the length of time students spend in study abroad experiences, with fewer students spending more than a semester abroad than in previous years.

International Programs at Southwest Missouri State University

Southwest Missouri State University currently enrolls students from more than eighty countries and has active faculty and student exchange programs with numerous countries worldwide. In addition, the university has begun establishing a number of joint programs in which the partner institution offers the first year of graduate study, and successful students then transfer to SMSU to complete their master's degrees. One such program is the MBA program offered jointly with the Madras School of Social Work in Madras, India. These international programs are becoming increasingly important in aiding students to better understand the world in which they live and work and the global issues they are likely to face during their lifetimes.

The Southwest Missouri State University Branch Campus at Liaoning Teachers University represents an aggressive step in SMSU's growing commitment to international education. Administrators at SMSU selected China as the location for the international branch campus based on a number of factors. First, China is the most populous country in the world, and its role in world affairs has become increasingly important. Second, the Chinese economy has continued to grow at an increasing rate during the past two decades, and U.S. companies and corporations are increasingly considering business opportunities in China. With its entry into the World Trade Organization, China will no doubt continue to be an important player in the world political and economic arenas. Third, establishment of a branch campus in China supports the goal of fostering an appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity and enables the university to take advantage of opportunities for its students and faculty to improve their understanding of and appreciation for the Chinese people. Finally, and very importantly, SMSU found a mutually beneficial partner in China, Liaoning Teachers University.

The branch campus is fundamental to the program in China, but is only one element of the relationship between SMSU and LTU. For example, the two universities are participating in a collaborative plant genetic research program that is expected to evolve into a collaborative master's degree, and eventually a doctoral degree, in plant science.

Linking the Branch Campus to the SMSU Long-Range Plan

As stated in its current long-range plan, SMSU's purpose is to "develop educated persons." An educated person is someone who is literate in the broadest sense, has an appreciation of the responsibility of lifelong citizenship and an awareness of global issues, seeks solutions to problems by means of a broad base of knowledge, and has the skills and motivation to continue to learn after leaving the university (Southwest Missouri State University 2000, 16). An awareness of global issues is prominent among the characteristics of educated persons. To help assure that graduates possess an awareness of global issues, the long-range plan outlines a number of long-standing programs as well as more recent initiatives in the arena of international education.

The university's Study Away Program has active participation by students. Study Away includes the Missouri London program; programs in Australia, France, Germany, and Mexico; as well as the French Language program and the Spanish Language program. These are in addition to short-term study tours that have been conducted by a variety of academic departments for decades. Other initiatives include academic programs such as the joint MBA program with the Madras School of Social Work in India and partnership agreements with Qingdao University and Liaoning Teachers University in the People's Republic of China (Southwest Missouri State University 2000, 40). Establishing an SMSU branch campus at Liaoning grew out of these agreements.

Students from more than eighty countries attend SMSU, but, at 2.9 percent, international student enrollment is below the national average of 3.2 percent reported by the Institute for International Education. (2000). Increasing international student enrollment to 4.5 percent is a goal of the SMSU system's enrollment management plan. International student enrollment at SMSU-West Plains is quite low (less than 1 percent), and overall the student body is not very diverse (3.6 percent minority enrollment). The branch campus will benefit the entire SMSU system, but especially SMSU-West Plains, as the institutions within the SMSU system attempt to become more culturally diverse. While of lesser importance than offering SMSU students opportunities for study abroad and Chinese students greater access to American higher education, establishing the branch campus at Liaoning will help the SMSU system meet that 4.5 percent enrollment goal.

Breaking even financially is a goal for the branch campus at Liaoning, but the university has no interest in "franchising" the SMSU name or in reaping large financial rewards. Of great importance, however, is assuring that the institution follows the Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs as outlined in the *Handbook for Accreditation* (The Higher Learning Commission 1997, 158–160). To this end, SMSU sought Higher Learning Commission guidance early in the process and formal Commission approval for the branch campus at the appropriate time.

Request for Institutional Change for SMSU-West Plains

The request for institutional change was initiated as the result of an eighteen-month planning process undertaken by the SMSU system to establish a branch campus in Dalian. Due to the uniqueness of the program in Dalian and of the SMSU system itself, SMSU officials felt the request had to (1) be a product of the system, (2) discuss the program from the perspective of both SMSU-West Plains and the SMSU system, and (3) demonstrate the ability of SMSU-West Plains to offer a quality academic program for the benefit of students in China. Development of the request was also influenced by the guidance of Commission Associate Director Karen Kietzman and by information provided by Associate Director Mary Breslin at the Commission Annual Meeting in April 2001.

The Request was organized in five sections:

1. Introduction
2. Information and documentation to support a request for institutional change
3. Evaluation of the branch campus program using the Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals
4. Summary
5. Appendices

In particular, the second section addressed the revised policies concerning institutional change contained in the "Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation" (March 2001, 37–41), and the specific policies and processes outlined in the six points contained in the Addendum (40–41). Each point and sub-point was provided, along with the appropriate response to those points and issues raised by them. The third section evaluated the branch campus program in its entirety on a principle-by-principle basis, as presented in the Principles of Good Practice in Chapter 11 of the *Handbook*.

In presenting the information in the request, the writers placed the specific policy, point, or sub-point being considered in a left-hand margin and the response to the issue under consideration in a wider right-hand margin.

This organization proved to be convenient for writing and editing via multiple e-mail transmissions between campuses and campus officials. Members of the site visit team also noted the ease in understanding how the request corresponded to the Commission's policies, processes, and practices.

Site Visit, Team Findings, and the Next Steps

The two-person site visit team from the Commission met with members of the SMSU system Coordinating Council, the SMSU China Management Group, the SMSU-West Plains staff and faculty who work specifically with the branch campus and its operations, and other members of the West Plains campus faculty, staff, and student population. With the request in hand, the team asked for clarification on some items, discussed future plans and expectations, and provided insight into various aspects of the program.

We want to emphasize that the Commission has not acted on the site team's recommendation and that approval is pending. The findings of the site team are important to the process of establishing the branch campus in Dalian, China. The team's findings, including strengths, challenges, advice, and recommendations are listed in the following summary.

- **Strengths of the program**
    - The China program is innovative, visionary, imaginative, and courageous.
    - The China Management Group facilitates communication and provides unified leadership.
    - Key staff members throughout the system are on top of things.
    - The program is based on the plans and goals of the SMSU system and SMSU-West Plains.
    - The program has the support of the system.
    - The cohort system for the branch campus works to support students and enhance retention.
    - The financial plan is sound, with generation of income in excess of expenditures.

- **Challenges**
    - Need means to expatriate dollars to cover costs in the United States.
    - Securing U.S. visas for Chinese students is critical to the success of the program.
    - Reaching goal of increasing internationalization of the West Plains campus.
    - Need Chinese students enrolled at the West Plains campus.
    - Need more West Plains faculty teaching at the branch campus in China.

- **Advice and suggestions**
    - Develop more ownership of the program on the West Plains campus.
    - Move more responsibilities to West Plains (recognizing that resources are needed to do that).
    - Incorporate information on the program into the University Life course required of all first-semester freshmen.
    - Need a comprehensive orientation program at both ends of the program.
    - Provide introduction to Chinese culture and basic language training at SMS-West Plains.
    - Provide introduction to American culture at the branch campus in China.
    - Need for SMSU-West Plains to plan for a greater international presence.
    - Need staff/community volunteers to care for the special needs of Chinese students enrolling in the SMSU system as their numbers grow.
    - Need English-as-a-second-language training.
    - Negotiate provisions on items 33 and 35 (good practice for international programs syllabus).
    - Develop culturally accurate assessment tools.
    - Find creative solutions to technological problems on the Chinese end of the program.

◊ **Recommendation**

- The site visit team recommended approval for institutional change to allow SMSU-West Plains to offer the degree on the China campus. It further recommended that the Commission review progress at the next full accreditation visit for SMSU-West Plains in 2003-2004.

The site visit team will next visit the branch campus in Dalian, China, evaluating the facilities and seeing first-hand the delivery of the courses that will compose the Associate of Arts degree in General Studies with an emphasis in business. That visit is planned for June 2002, with the team's final recommendation to the Commission immediately following the visit.

Final approval from the Commission is anticipated by fall 2002 in order to offer the degree in its entirety and to begin marketing the degree as being available through the branch campus program.

The SMSU-West Plains and the SMSU system will continue to monitor the branch campus program and to assess the progress of its students, making changes as needed and reassessing the entire program for reauthorization by the SMSU board of governors at the end of the three-year pilot program.

Assessment Plan for the SMSU Branch Campus at Liaoning Teachers University

From the start, SMSU system administrators and planners focused on developing an aggressive assessment plan specific to the branch campus. The assessment plan was viewed as a key building block and management element to ensure that the branch campus would be linked to the SMSU system mission and to ensure accountability.

The student assessment outcome plan for the SMSU branch campus at Liaoning Teachers University (Figure1) covers a four-year, six-semester time frame. The purpose of the fourth year is to continue to follow graduates from the branch campus to see how they are performing academically after transferring to four-year institutions or, for those students not continuing their education, how they are doing in finding employment.

The assessment schedule of students at the branch campus is intense (Figure 1). It is expected that the ultimate determinant of student success will be proficiency in English composition, grammar, conversation, and listening comprehension. Accordingly, the branch campus assessment plan focuses heavily on assessing English skills of the students, and the results of those assessments will be used to make changes to teaching strategies and approaches being used if necessary.

Within one year following graduation of students from the SMSU branch campus at Liaoning Teachers University, pooled outcome data will be collected, and the results will be utilized to determine the effectiveness of the branch campus in delivering a quality and appropriate education to its students. The data will be used also by administrators from SMSU-West Plains and the SMSU system to make program changes as deemed necessary and will be incorporated into the regular planning process of both SMSU-West Plains and the SMSU system.

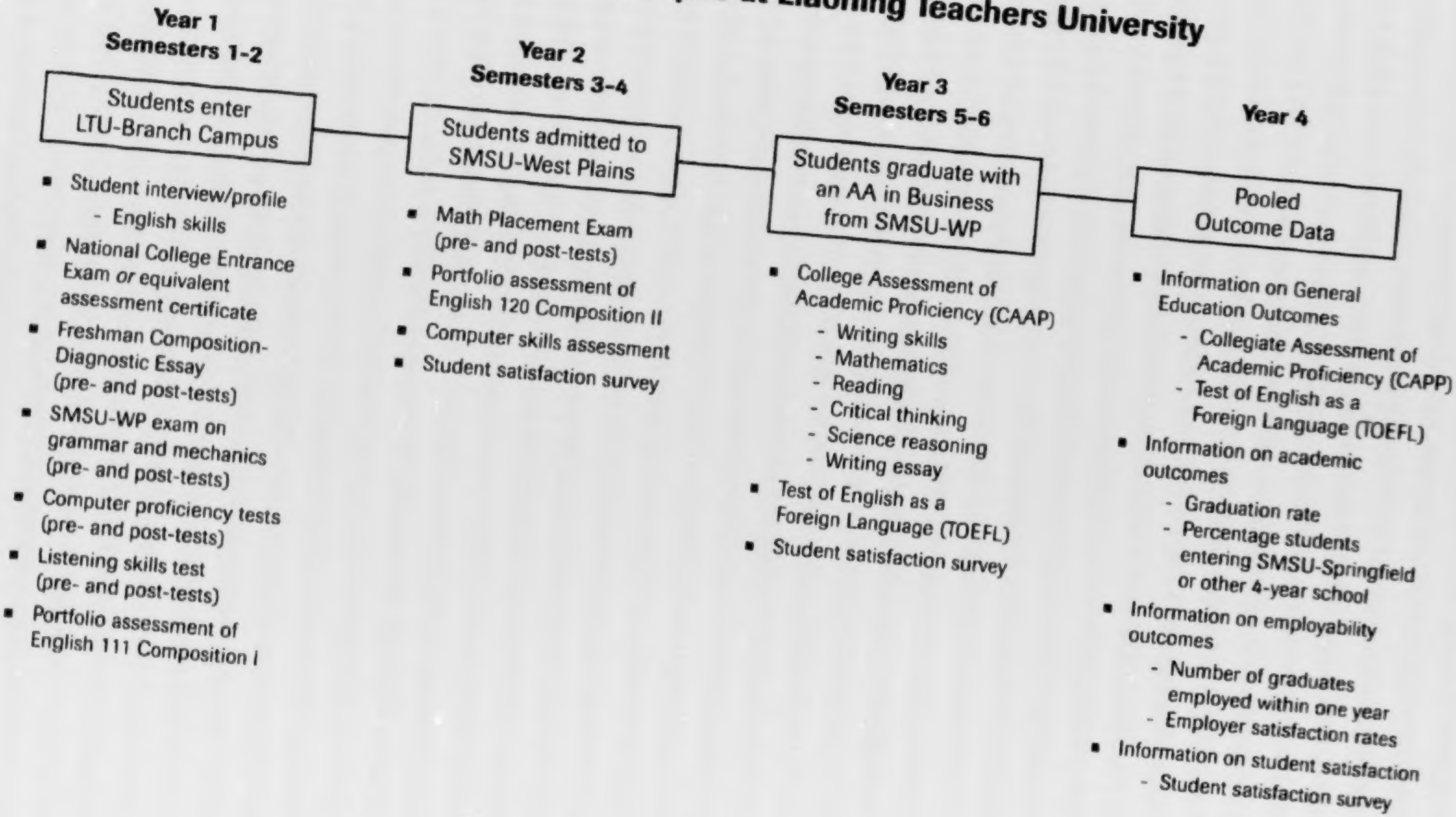
Administering the assessment plan at the branch campus has proved to be quite challenging but at the same time rewarding. The challenges center around what might be considered "test anxiety," differences in educational systems, cultural differences, and technical issues. The first challenge faced in conducting assessment is that Chinese students are not familiar with the concept of assessment as used in American institutions. In China, tests such as the National College Entrance Examination are extremely stressful, and many of the Chinese students view the assessment instruments as simply another test that they must successfully complete. As a result, many of the students become overly anxious when asked to complete the assessment instrument.

The second major challenge arises from differences in the Chinese and American educational systems. Teaching and learning in China is quite different from that in American universities. For example, in China lectures are the most frequent delivery system, and students tend to be passive and not engage in classroom discussion. Assessment instruments developed for students at SMSU-West Plains are not necessarily appropriate in the Chinese learning environment. As a second example, the mathematics skills of the Chinese students are very high. The math placement examination used to assess SMSU-West Plains students was too simple for the Chinese students at the branch campus to be useful as an assessment instrument. As a result, the math placement test has been modified and the mathematics curriculum changed to reflect the advanced level of mathematics skills of the students at the branch campus.

Cultural differences are a third area of challenge. For example, the initial composition diagnostic essays used to assess students were not effective because the questions touch on areas of American culture about which the Chinese

Figure 1

Student Assessment Outcome Plan for SMSU Branch Campus at Liaoning Teachers University



Year 1
Semesters 1-2

Students enter LTU-Branch Campus

- Student interview/profile
  - English skills
- National College Entrance Exam *or* equivalent assessment certificate
- Freshman Composition-Diagnostic Essay (pre- and post-tests)
- SMSU-WP exam on grammar and mechanics (pre- and post-tests)
- Computer proficiency tests (pre- and post-tests)
- Listening skills test (pre- and post-tests)
- Portfolio assessment of English 111 Composition I

Year 2
Semesters 3-4

Students admitted to SMSU-West Plains

- Math Placement Exam (pre- and post-tests)
- Portfolio assessment of English 120 Composition II
- Computer skills assessment
- Student satisfaction survey

Year 3
Semesters 5-6

Students graduate with an AA in Business from SMSU-WP

- College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)
  - Writing skills
  - Mathematics
  - Reading
  - Critical thinking
  - Science reasoning
  - Writing essay
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- Student satisfaction survey

Year 4

Pooled Outcome Data

- Information on General Education Outcomes
  - Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAPP)
  - Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- Information on academic outcomes
  - Graduation rate
  - Percentage students entering SMSU-Springfield or other 4-year school
- Information on employability outcomes
  - Number of graduates employed within one year
  - Employer satisfaction rates
- Information on student satisfaction
  - Student satisfaction survey

students had little knowledge. The challenge in this environment is to conduct American-style assessment in a Chinese cultural context.

The fourth challenge area is the technical difficulties of administering some of the assessment instruments. For example, the SMSU computer proficiency test is an online assessment instrument. The computer network at the branch campus did not have sufficient capacity to handle the online test. As a result, the computer proficiency test is being slightly modified so that it can remain an online assessment instrument for use at the branch campus.

Although the challenges are significant, the rewards of intense assessment have been numerous. The assessment has provided feedback to faculty that has enabled them to address learning issues of individual students as well as continuously review the effectiveness and appropriateness of the curriculum. In addition, developing assessment instruments has required SMSU faculty to become much more knowledgeable about the Chinese education system. Of course, the ultimate success of the assessment effort will be the academic success of students enrolled at the branch campus.

Concluding Remarks

The Southwest Missouri State University Branch Campus at Liaoning Teachers University represents the commitment of the Southwest Missouri State University system to international education. The campus also represents the university's unwavering commitment to provide quality education to its students, both in the United States and abroad. The branch campus is closely aligned with the university's mission to develop educated students who have an awareness and appreciation of global issues and possess the skills necessary to live and work in an increasingly global society. By linking institutional mission, values, and accountability, Southwest Missouri State University has been able to successfully operate an effective and high-quality international branch campus.

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Part 2
Improving Student Learning

Chapter 7
Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Faculty/Staff/Student Participation

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
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NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

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Envisioning a Thoroughly Academic Accountability and a Thoroughly Accountable Academy

David A. Shupe

The Situation in Which We Find Ourselves

Among the many challenges facing higher education, the newest and perhaps the most difficult challenge is making our educational results visible. The growing expectation is that we answer many different versions of the question "how well prepared are our students for the world they are entering?" with empirical data–data with a clarity and a specificity to which we are unaccustomed. Those data would be used both to link expectations and resources to actual results and to make changes that result in improved student learning. This summarizes what is now being expected by regional accreditation agencies, by professional accreditation associations, and by grant-making agencies. It speaks to the intent of actions taken, in many states, by governing boards and legislatures. It generalizes the question asked, explicitly or implicitly, by parents about the college or university that their son or daughter is attending.

The problem is that we are being asked to exercise an organizational capability that postsecondary institutions have never had. We have embedded information systems that were never intended to accomplish these new ends. They were developed to support an academic practice in which it was sufficient to measure a student's educational progress by accumulated credits and to measure the quality of a student's achievement by faculty assignment of a course grade. Credits and grades, though, are now seen as lacking the needed clarity and specificity.

This places us in a difficult position. It is learning–the personal, professional, and intellectual development of individuals–that is the primary process for the creation of value in colleges and universities, yet this is the one process about which colleges and universities, *as organizations*, have little or no data. Most learning is invisible, because our institutions do not have the means to capture or retain the crucial information: what a student has learned–that is, has demonstrated that he or she knows and can do–while being one of our students. Yes, there are recorded grades, but what did the student learn in order to earn any individual grade? *The organization cannot say because it does not know.* How does what the student learned in one course differ from what he or she learned in another course? *The organization cannot say because it does not know.* How ready, really, is a student, after completing one course, for the next follow-on course? *The organization cannot say, because it does not know.* What, then, are the student learning outcomes for that student in a given term, or, indeed, in a given degree program? *The organization cannot say, because it does not know.*

This lack of organizational knowledge, this structural inability for postsecondary institutions to systematically recognize student achievements as they occur, has multiple negative effects. It inhibits student learning, which, in turn, means that students are not as well prepared for the world they are entering as we (or they) may wish they were. It obscures variation among students in the classroom, which, in turn, makes teaching more difficult. It forces us, as concern for "results" increases, to overcontrol the curriculum, which, in turn, leads to curricular monotony and standardization. Finally, it presents a strong impression to outsiders that we are perhaps not preparing students well, which, in turn, contributes to difficulties in legislative budget and accountability decisions.

For academics, this perspective is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. We certainly want the academy to be a better place, but "better" would have a meaning drawn from a perspective less concerned with demonstrating results than with having an overall environment that has certain characteristics. These would include creating a distinctive institution, recognizing individual strengths among faculty, maintaining academic standards, and refreshing a dynamic curriculum. Given a finite amount of time beyond one's academic load, most academics would choose to put their efforts into working toward ends like these, not specifying results.

Thus, as presently construed, the new expectations for data are at odds with long-standing academic practices and prevailing academic culture. Our systems cannot accommodate these expectations, and most academics dislike them. Colleges have come to expect that the task of producing data about student achievement is onerous, disruptive of learning, and distractive. Unsurprisingly, there is no positive "vision of the future" to motivate those working on assessing and documenting outcomes. Only two futures are imagined: a continuation of the present difficulties, or the hope that this concern for specified results will somehow disappear.

Envisioning a Far Better Future

Let us envision a far more positive future in which faculty and administrators can work to make their colleges and universities better academically and still have continuously produced and appropriately aggregated data on student achievement. This would mean to envision both a thoroughly academic accountability and a thoroughly accountable academy. The term "thoroughly" precludes any carefully crafted political co-existence. Rather, the future to be imagined is one in which a college or university can more completely develop and demonstrate its distinctiveness, more fully reward individual strengths in both faculty and students, more rigorously maintain academic standards across the curriculum, and offer a creative and more dynamic curriculum–and do all of these not in spite of but precisely *because* of systematically and continuously produced data on student achievement.

The academic practices and structures of this future academic setting are much like they are today, with the following exceptions:

1. **Administration** has made available a new Web-based information system to students, faculty, and all college staff who advise or supervise students. The system has an elegant and empty structure for specifying and calibrating student achievements (or learning outcomes) and the academic standards by which these learning outcomes are evaluated. For each specific outcome, the system keeps track of its status: e.g., anticipated, required by program [both indicated by faculty], intended [indicated by student], in-progress [system-generated], or completed [which can only be indicated by faculty or authorized staff]. Indicating a completed status creates one of many records with an identical structure–linking a specific student to a specific achievement at a specific time in a specific curricular (or other college) setting.

2. **Faculty** work together to pre-define which achievements will be evaluated and which shared standards will be used for that evaluation. The generic structure makes it easy for them to identify a specific achievement as being of a certain type, area, and level, all of which are determined by faculty. Faculty in a specific academic program identify what they would like (or require) students to know and do in that program. College-wide faculty committees identify what they would like students to know and do, regardless of their enrolled academic program. While only some faculty take coursework time to instruct students in these college-wide expected outcomes, the evaluation standards are generic enough and clear enough so that every faculty member using that outcome in his or her course evaluates students by the same standards. Overall, faculty carefully choose learning opportunities for a course, and then they "teach to the course."

3. **Each student** understands that the college is attending to his or her personal, professional, and intellectual development. Their tasks, then, are to learn and to demonstrate that learning. Students have access to a description of the full range of achievements that the faculty stand ready to evaluate, as well as the accompanying standards. From the first day at the college, they understand that the value of their degree will be the record of the actual learning outcomes that the college acknowledges for them. In the end, that record is a creative combination of the strengths of the college, the faculty, and the individual student.

4. At the point that students have demonstrated an achievement, **faculty** evaluate their work and create the record that links each student to an achievement, including how well that student did (e.g., 3 on a 4-point rubric or a score of 85 percent on a test). Faculty and students both attend to the learning that actually has occurred, whether that achievement was expected or not. It is recognized that much of this actual learning is not reflected in the ostensible subject of the course (or internship, extracurricular activity, service learning, study abroad, or other supervised learning setting). Students attend to this because it is in their interest to have their learning achievements acknowledged. In the case of an unexpected achievement, faculty ask for evidence from the student and use their critical judgment to place that achievement in its proper place.

5. The database provided by **administration** now contains records for expected student achievement, standards, and actual student achievement. Standardized and customized searches permit a wide range of data to be instantly available.

- A data search for a specific student provides the fundamental capacity to document and track each student's educational progress, across-the-curriculum, by demonstrated achievements. The student's online view of this–available at any time–compares required, intended, in-progress, and actual achievements. Another version, showing only actual achievements, is available for students to send to outside viewers.
- A data search for a specific achievement provides the capacity to review how often a given achievement has been completed in the college and where this has occurred in the curriculum.
- A data search for a specific time frame provides a running chronological record of recorded achievements.
- A data search for any specific curricular setting (any combination of program, course, section, term) provides the capacity to review the expected, in-progress, and actual achievements.

An Accountable Academy

It may be noted that the changes in academic practice between this envisioned future and the present are relatively small: faculty engage in ongoing discourse to assure consistency in academic standards, and they enter data per student per achievement. From this small difference, the benefits of what we are imagining are disproportionately large. The college or university, as organization, focuses on each student and his or her demonstrated achievements, allows the student to find his or her strengths among the full range of types of achievement, and follows the student's development across the curriculum. From a single efficient data-gathering process–each faculty member evaluating the work of his or her own students–it becomes possible to have a wide range of aggregate data on actual student learning. An academic program now has constructive feedback comparing its expected and actual outcomes–the "enacted curriculum." Additionally, the college can ascertain whether a student is ready for the next learning opportunity or has completed the program outcomes. An instructor can know, as a course begins, what level of achievement the students are bringing to the course. Students have another college record to show to prospective employers and, realizing that this record will be viewed as an accurate record of their preparedness for what they choose to do after college, they begin to take ownership of what that record shows. In sum, accountability is well allocated across the college (including students), and there is a wealth of data about actual educational results.

An Academic Accountability

Nevertheless, the way in which these data are constructed actually makes it more possible to address improvements that academics would readily choose.

A college now has a new way to demonstrate its *distinctiveness:* its "catalog" showing the faculty's collective choice of anticipated student achievements (and the places in the curriculum for learning opportunities in which these achievements can de demonstrated). No two colleges will be alike, and each will have clear emphases that set it apart. These emphases are not just rhetoric; translated into anticipated learning outcomes, they are integrated into the day-to-day teaching and learning of the institution. The college can also be proud of its record of actual student achievements. While it can continue to point to graduates who excel after college, it now has direct ways to point to excellence in achievement among current students.

This distinctive and rich set of anticipated student achievements is, in large part, the result of the *strengths of individual faculty* who have chosen to be at that college. A faculty member's special emphases in his or her primary field become crucial to enhancing the achievement for some students. Additionally, while many of these faculty strengths fall within a primary field, many others (especially those that concern performance, perspective, or capability) do not. Avocations become relevant when they are done with attention to excellence, and faculty and staff can become mentors to (and evaluators of) students in areas outside their primary field.

Academic standards become the basis of this approach. Students soon learn realize that, once having learned to meet a certain standard of achievement for, say, writing or public speaking or research methods, they will be held to that standard everywhere in the curriculum. This reinforcement of standards is powerful lesson. So is the faculty expectation that a student will use what he or she has already demonstrated as the foundation for subsequent work. The challenge is to reach for the next level of achievement in that area.

Finally, when it is achievement data, not course enrollment data, that show students' readiness for the next learning opportunity, the *curriculum* can become more *dynamic and flexible.* Courses, as actually taught by faculty, should be creative combinations of learning opportunities, and this allows that to be so. Faculty can change courses primarily defined by subject matter by introducing new course activities that emphasize different desired student capabilities. Faculty can change courses primarily defined by capabilities by choosing topics that are responsive to current events.

All four of these academic interests become more possible precisely because the educational progress of individual students is "measured" by their demonstrated achievements.

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Obstacles in Outcomes Assessment: Identifying and Overcoming Them

Janet L. Woldt

Introduction

It can generally be assumed that anyone attempting to implement an outcomes assessment process—be it student, programmatic, or institutional—will encounter obstacles that prevent the successful completion of the outcomes assessment process. Identifying these obstacles will aid those faculty and administration within institutions of higher education in more effectively implementing outcomes assessment programs. This assumption is based upon the premise that successful implementation of an outcomes assessment program is dependent upon the continuous completion of an outcomes assessment process or cycle.

This paper will review recent research conducted on obstacles encountered in the outcomes assessment process. The particular study highlighted sought to determine, (1) What specific obstacles prevent program administration from successfully completing an outcomes assessment process?, and (2) To what degree do these obstacles prevent program administration from successfully completing an outcomes assessment process? To answer these two questions, program administrators across the nation were surveyed. The data revealed the following specific obstacles, which impede progress to a significant degree: insufficient time, funding, and personnel to conduct assessment activities; failing support from external audiences, such as alumni and employers of graduates, in the outcomes assessment process; the complexity of the outcomes assessment process; institutional personnel's varying levels of understanding of outcomes assessment as a process and a philosophy; and inadequate communication, leadership, and guidance concerning assessment matters. Suggestions for solving problems affiliated with these obstacles are also discussed, as are the study's findings in relationship to The Higher Learning Commission's Levels of Implementation.

Recent Research Conducted

Using the eight-phase McCann Outcomes Assessment Cycle (Figure 1), the author conducted a study in 2001 identifying major obstacles encountered by dental hygiene education program directors in managing programmatic outcomes assessment activities. The study of such obstacles is significant because the overwhelming majority of dental hygiene education programs are not successfully and effectively completing the outcomes assessment process, as documented by citations contained in accreditation site visit reports.

In the United States, all dental hygiene education programs are sponsored by regionally or nationally accredited public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities, with the exception of Alabama. At the program level, outcomes assessment for dental hygiene education programs has been mandated by the American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation through its Accreditation Standards for Dental Hygiene Education Programs since 1986, when the commission adopted an outcomes assessment standard. Prior to this revision, outcomes assessment was not mandated as a part of dental hygiene education by the commission. Since 1988, when the outcomes assessment standard was implemented, the commission has observed that those schools/programs that most successfully meet this standard treat assessment as an ongoing process that has value apart from accreditation (American Dental Association 2000).

Because outcomes assessment has been mandated for several years by the Commission on Dental Accreditation, it can be assumed that dental hygiene education programs have outcomes assessment programs in place. Therefore, it is not a matter of a dental hygiene education program *having* an outcomes assessment program in place, but of how *effective* that outcomes assessment program is. This level of effectiveness can be determined by the identification of obstacles impeding the outcomes assessment process and improved by the removal of those obstacles.

☐ Methodology

The target population for this study included the 256 dental hygiene education program directors in the United States who represented the 256 dental hygiene education programs accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation in 2000. Of that number, a sample of 135 dental hygiene education program directors from regionally accredited public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities were selected. Of the 135 program directors surveyed, 107 (79 percent) responded, completing a sixty-five-item self-administered survey-type questionnaire titled "A Survey of Dental Hygiene Education Program Directors' Perceptions of Potential Procedural Roadblocks Encountered in Conducting Outcomes Assessment Activities." As noted previously, the McCann Outcomes Assessment Cycle (Figure 1), developed by Ann McCann (Director of Assessment, Assessment Center for Health Professions Education, Baylor College of Dentistry Texas A&M University) was used extensively in studying the obstacles (i.e., obstacles were grouped and analyzed according to the eight phases of the McCann cycle).

The survey included five major parts. Part I contained forty-four potential procedural obstacles that program administration may encounter in conducting outcomes assessment activities. Respondents were asked to rate each of these forty-four obstacles on a 5-point Likert-type scale as to how much they perceived the obstacle hindered their ability/efforts to successfully complete the outcomes assessment process. Part II contained items of a general nature on outcomes assessment with 5-point Likert-type scales, and yes/no items. Part III asked respondents to rate their perceptions on the eight phases of the McCann Outcomes Assessment Cycle using 4-point Likert-type scales. Part IV collected demographic data and included: the respondent's position within the dental hygiene education program; who is responsible for conducting assessment activities and for analysis of assessment data; the academic degrees offered by the dental hygiene education program; and, the institutional classification. Part V sought to collect data on respondents' past training in outcomes assessment and their perceived training needs.

Major Obstacles Identified

Of the forty-four obstacles identified for the study, fifteen had mean impediment ratings of 3.0 or higher (on a 5-point scale) and were rated by greater than 50 percent of respondents as slightly, moderately, or severely impeding their progress in the outcomes assessment process. These were identified as the fifteen major obstacles and are as follows, with the percentage of respondents in parentheses.

Major Obstacles in Programmatic Outcomes Assessment Ranked According to Percent of Surveyed Dental Hygiene Program Directors Who Feel That These Obstacles Impede Progress in the Outcomes Assessment Process

1. Inadequate time to spend on assessment activities (90 percent)
2. Lack of time to follow up on improvements that have been made and implemented as a result of outcomes assessment activities (79 percent)
3. Inadequate number of faculty dedicated to assessment activities (78 percent)
4. Lack of cooperation from employers of graduates of the program in conducting assessment activities, e.g., completing surveys (78 percent)
5. Faculty's lack of preparedness/training in outcomes assessment activities (75 percent)
6. Lack of financial resources to follow up on improvements (74 percent)
7. Complexity of the outcomes assessment process (74 percent)
8. Lack of cooperation from alumni of the program in conducting assessment activities, e.g., completing surveys (73 percent)
9. Inadequate number of clerical staff available to assist with assessment activities (71 percent)
10. Inadequate availability of training in outcomes assessment (67 percent)
11. Lack of a departmental committee that is specifically responsible for assessment activities (67 percent)
12. Inadequate funding for assessment activities (63 percent)
13. Lack of communication with and isolation from other departments within the institution regarding assessment activities, e.g., campus-wide assessment committee (61 percent)
14. Lack of a dental hygiene assessment committee that provides guidance on using assessment information for program improvement (60 percent)
15. Lack of knowledgeable staff to assist in conducting data analysis (56 percent)

These fifteen major obstacles can be grouped into six separate categories:

1. Lack of time to conduct assessment activities
2. Lack of funding to conduct assessment activities
3. Lack of faculty/staff to conduct or assist in assessment activities
4. Lack of cooperation from external audiences
5. Complexity of the outcomes assessment process hindered by the lack of preparedness of faculty, who do not have access to appropriate training in assessment
6. Lack of communication and guidance on outcomes assessment from within the program/department and the institution

Generalizability of the Study's Findings

Because the results of this study encompass universal concerns among the whole of higher education (encompassing multiple types of institutions), the results can be applied not only to programmatic outcomes assessment but to student and institutional outcomes assessment as well. Therefore, even though this study was conducted on programmatic outcomes assessment, faculty, staff, and/or administration involved in implementing an outcomes assessment process for students, programs, or institutions may benefit by closely examining the results of these data.

Overcoming Obstacles

Overcoming obstacles in outcomes assessment is largely dependent on institutional personnel who manage outcomes assessment programs having the knowledge and awareness of appropriate outcomes assessment-related support and resources. The first four categories of major obstacles–lack of time, funding, personnel, and cooperation from external audiences in conducting outcomes assessment–involve appropriate support and are common concerns among the whole of higher education. Such common or "basic needs" concerns are addressed in the following practical strategies to overcome outcomes assessment obstacles (adapted from Concordia College 2000).

Practical Strategies to Overcome Obstacles Encountered in Outcomes Assessment

- Assessment should be an ongoing process. Do not assess everything at the same time. Spread assessment activities out over the academic year and summer.
- Work as a team with your department. Do not have one person do all the work.
- Cooperate with other departments. Faculty from other departments could facilitate focus groups.
- Do as much as possible within the context of things you are already doing/getting paid to do.
- Borrow methods and instruments from other departments or other institutions.
  - Saves time–no need to "reinvent the wheel."
  - Find out how well it worked for the others. Learn from other's success and mistakes.
  - Attend institutional assessment meetings or symposia to hear what other departments are doing.
  - Tap into assessment newsletters or Web links to assessment at other institutions.
- Buy existing instruments, where appropriate, instead of creating them.
  - Saves time.
  - May provide comparative information.
- Make instruments, assignments, or samples as short as possible, yet still provide pertinent information.
  - This encourages optimal use of student time, faculty time, and analysis time.
  - Focus on your goals. Do not ask questions about unrelated things or collect information that will not provide feedback about the goals.
  - On surveys, do not ask several questions about the same thing.

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- ○ Delegate assessment tasks when possible. Enlist the help of
  - Support staff in your department.
  - Student workers (e.g., data entry).
  - Students enrolled in independent study (e.g., working with design of instruments or analysis of results), when this matches what students are studying.
- ○ Use electronic media as much as possible.
  - Database and spreadsheet applications greatly simplify analysis of data.
  - Electronic storage of portfolios, papers, etc.
- ○ Take advantage of resources available on campus, such as
  - Workshops and discussion sessions.
  - Consultation with department or institutional assessment committee.
  - Institutional research or institutional effectiveness office.
- ○ Use tried-and-tested assessment tools, such as
  - Cross and Angelo's Teaching Goals Inventory (Angelo and Cross 1993) for student and course assessment, to make the outcomes assessment process more efficient.
  - A matrix, as suggested by The Higher Learning Commission, which forces the clarification of goals and the development of processes to objectively determine how, when, and whether the goals are being met.

☐ Complexity of Outcomes Assessment: Levels of Understanding

The last two categories of major obstacles concern the complexity of the outcomes assessment process, the lack of knowledge about outcomes assessment among those expected to implement an outcomes assessment program, and the lack of communication and guidance from mid- and upper-level administration concerning outcomes assessment.

Among faculty and administration at institutions of higher education, there are many different levels of understanding about outcomes assessment as a philosophy and as a process. The results of the author's study indicated the levels at which programs are engaged in the outcomes assessment process vary from vague to intimate familiarity with the process. Some institutional personnel are able to see the "big picture" of assessment and the potential of the outcomes process to improve teaching and student learning. Others see assessment only at the student level, but not as affecting the institution as a whole.

These varying levels must be recognized and addressed by an institution's administration. A means by which this could occur are institutionally sponsored workshops on outcomes assessment offered at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of understanding. Further, any printed materials that the institution publishes must address the levels of understanding as well. All faculty, staff, and administration within an institution must be provided with a solid foundation in the rudimentary aspects of outcomes assessment before effective and successful implementation of an outcomes assessment process can occur.

☐ Effective Communication

Another aspect concerning the complexity of outcomes assessment is the perceived uncertainty of the accreditation guidelines regarding assessment. At many institutions, there is confusion about what exactly must be provided to an accrediting agency to satisfy the requirements. The Higher Learning Commission provides detailed materials and sponsors conferences and workshops to guide institutions in outcomes assessment; however, this information must be processed and unanimously agreed upon by upper-level administration. Therefore, institutional support of outcomes assessment must be seamlessly and accordingly relayed from upper-level administration to mid-level administration to faculty.

In order for institutional administration to enjoy the successful implementation of an outcomes assessment process, upper-level administration must relay consistent and clear information to institutional personnel. The communication of accurate information regarding outcomes assessment is key in implementing an outcomes assessment process. This communication is largely dependent upon the leadership and guidance provided by the administration.

☐ Leadership and Guidance

Because of the complexity of the outcomes assessment process, faculty and administration may generally find the process difficult to understand and difficult to implement. Further, the complex process of assessment has been

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added to the already challenging and taxing jobs of faculty and administration. Generally speaking, the way in which administration chooses to implement the decision-making process plays a critical role in faculty's reaction to and support of decisions made concerning outcomes assessment. Leadership and guidance in this process must be consistently provided by the administration throughout the institution to ensure the successful implementation of an outcomes assessment process.

Good leaders are those people who can mobilize human, material, and symbolic resources toward specific ends (Curry 1992, 20). Institutional leadership must effectively facilitate the outcomes assessment process by performing tasks such as gathering information, communicating with other members of the institution, developing new coalitions, and identifying existing coalitions. It is imperative that upper administration convey to the faculty and mid-level administration that they are integral stakeholders in the outcomes assessment process. Effective leadership must also be able to communicate that the results of outcomes assessment are not immediate. It may take several months to a few years to see results and to "permeate all aspects of campus culture with structures that make assessment self-sustaining" (Gray 1997, 13).

Relating the Study's Findings to the Levels of Implementation

In 2000, The Higher Learning Commission developed Levels of Implementation to clarify and objectify its stance on outcomes assessment.

> These Levels are presented in the form of a matrix and consist of three levels of implementation and four patterns of characteristics or descriptors associated with each level. The patterns associated with Level One, "Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs," include a number of characteristics consistent with assessment efforts that are in their infancy, or that are progressing at a slower than desired pace, or that have stalled. Patterns associated with Level Two, "Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs," include characteristics consistent with the value the institution, its academic departments, and each of its academic programs place on measuring student learning and assessing the outcomes against clearly specified goals and measurable objectives and outcomes in the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. Patterns associated with Level Three, "Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement," include characteristics that have been culled from those assessment programs that are structured, systematic, ongoing, and sustainable. In institutions that manifest this level of attainment in their assessment programs, assessment has become a way of life (López 2000, 2).

When institutional administration and faculty can identify obstacles that hinder progress, they will be better able to develop solutions to overcome those obstacles and achieve the upper Levels of Implementation. The fewer obstacles that are present, the more amenable administration and faculty will be to work with or continue to work with outcomes assessment programs. Further, with knowledge of the Levels of Implementation, potential obstacles, and solutions, administration and faculty will be sufficiently equipped to work toward developing an all-encompassing culture of assessment at their institution.

As noted by López (2000), "The Commission expects that the document, Levels of Implementation, will be a tool that our affiliated institutions can use to understand and strengthen their assessment programs." So too can the results of the aforementioned research on obstacles be used to strengthen student, programmatic, and institutional outcomes assessment programs.

Conclusion

The terms and processes associated with outcomes assessment in higher education are not new and have been in existence for more than twenty years. However, outcomes assessment is still perceived as new by many faculty and administration at the grass-roots level. This newness may be attributed to the near exclusive discussion of outcomes assessment at the "ivory tower" upper administration level, and not at the grass-roots level. Further, outcomes assessment models and processes have been classified by seasoned experts in the field as complex and difficult to understand (Gray 1997). Because of its perceived newness and complexity, faculty and administration are at different levels in understanding what assessment is and how it works. Acknowledgement of these various levels is key as institutional administration formulates and develops plans to implement an outcomes assessment program.

The obstacles, frustrations, and struggles experienced by faculty and administration regarding the complexity of outcomes assessment and effective leadership and guidance in the implementation of an outcomes assessment program are common among institutions of higher education in the United States. Messina and Fagans state that this is a nationwide concern because "All institutions of higher education are subject to regulations and policies from outside the institution" (1992, 8). Many faculty are first exposed to outcomes assessment when their institution is in the process of preparing a self-study for an external accrediting agency. When outcomes assessment is introduced on this personal level (i.e., faculty involved in preparing the self-study) faculty begin to understand what outcomes assessment really means (Gray 1997). However, the true benefit of outcomes assessment is realized when those implementing it acknowledge its use as not just an accreditation requirement but also as a means to bolster student academic achievement through the improvement of teaching and student learning.

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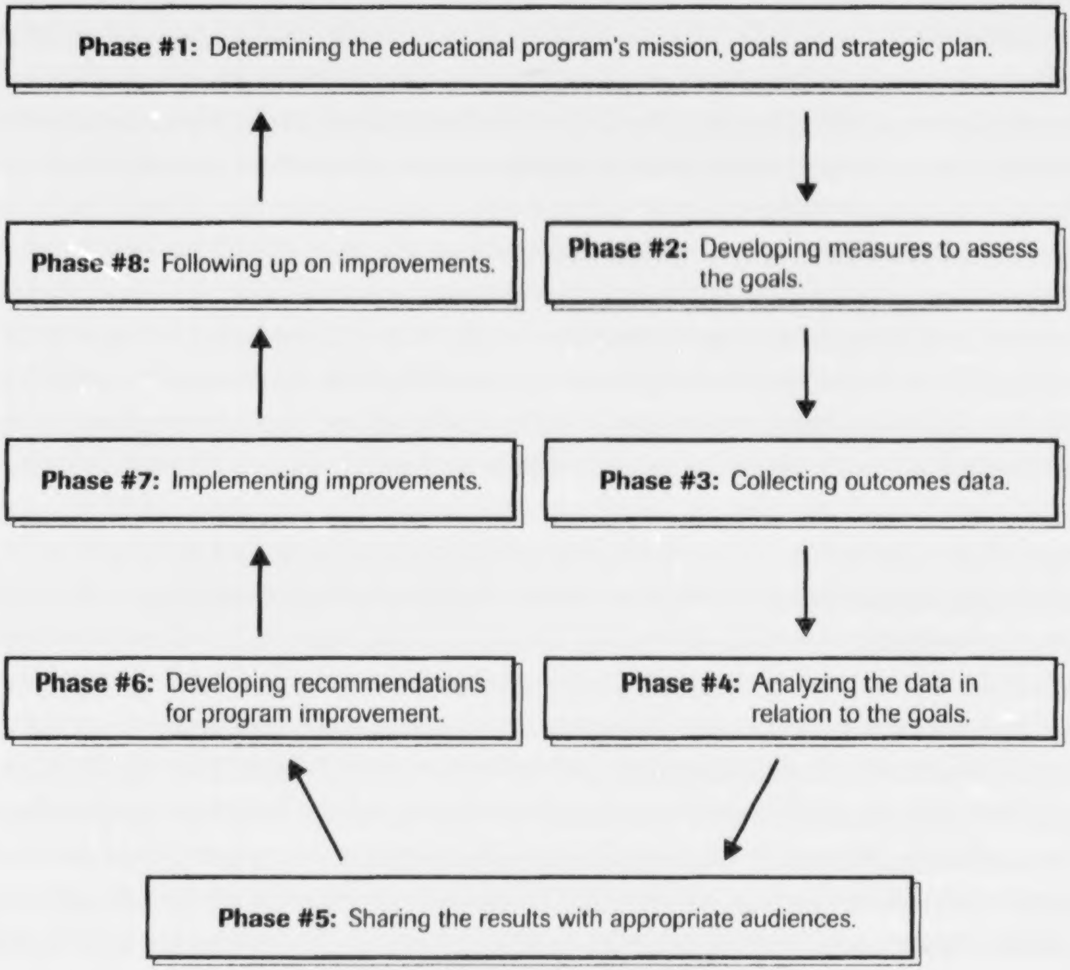
Appendix

Obstacles in Outcomes Assessment: Identifying and Overcoming Them


Phase #1: Determining the educational program's mission, goals and strategic plan.
Phase #2: Developing measures to assess the goals.
Phase #3: Collecting outcomes data.
Phase #4: Analyzing the data in relation to the goals.
Phase #5: Sharing the results with appropriate audiences.
Phase #6: Developing recommendations for program improvement.
Phase #7: Implementing improvements.
Phase #8: Following up on improvements.

Evolving a Campus Assessment Culture

John C. Simonson
George E. Smith

Like many institutions, the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UWP) experienced initial assessment activities that were discipline-based and piecemeal. Documented assessment efforts at UW-Platteville date back to the early 1980s, although most academic programs on campus have always engaged in some form of assessment.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the evolution of a campus-wide assessment culture. Included are a brief history of assessment at UWP, the development of a campus assessment plan, an inventory of campus assessment activities, and discussion of the relationships among campus administration, faculty, and staff regarding assessment.

Brief History of Assessment on Campus

In the early 1980s, the University of Wisconsin System initiated formal discussion of assessment, a dialogue in which UW-Platteville was an active participant. This discussion focused on the fundamental principles of assessment, with specific concern in the area of basic skills. As a member of the systemwide task force on assessment, UWP assessed the writing and mathematics skills of a representative sample of its students and also participated in a pilot assessment project in its College of Engineering.

Additional program-specific assessment was conducted by individual programs and colleges during this period. For example, the Department of Economics began a series of pedagogical experiments in 1987 designed to improve students' critical thinking skills in the introductory economics course. Over the next few years, the department assessed specific aspects of critical thinking, as identified by the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal. Findings were then applied to teaching methodologies, which were refined over several years.

Formal assessment of basic skills began in the early 1990s, although varying methodologies limited direct comparison of student data. Several external instruments were evaluated for appropriateness, but the UW System elected to require individual campuses to administer the ACT-CAAP tools for writing and mathematics skills. While the UW System mandate required such administration once every five years, UWP opted to administer these tests (as well as the critical thinking skills tool) every two years.

A significant assessment accomplishment in 1994-95 was an input assessment of all courses approved within the institution's general education program. The undergraduate curriculum commission assessed more than three hundred courses, resulting in the removal of more than twenty courses and revisions in many others.

In addition to its ongoing work with ACT-CAAP, the campus embarked on a variety of other assessment activities over the past five years, keyed by the critical development of an institutional assessment plan in 1995.

The Assessment Plan

In 1994, UW-Platteville created an assessment planning committee with the intention of drafting a formal plan for campus-wide assessment. While *The Plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement* (1995) dealt primarily with concerns of *educational* assessment, assessment of non-academic activities continued in other areas of campus life. The plan was endorsed by the faculty senate, campus administration, and UW System (in part, because of a system mandate that campuses develop such documents). The plan also received positive reactions from the members of the North Central Association team during their campus evaluation in 1996.

The assessment plan consisted of five sections: (1) an introduction and overview; (2) a brief historical and philosophical perspective; (3) identification of the key structures and strategies for assessing basic skills, liberal studies, and individual academic programs; (4) an implementation plan, including establishment of an assessment oversight committee and designation of responsibilities for various types of assessment on campus; and (5) a summary. In addition, appendices included mission statements and an extensive inventory of campus assessment activities in administrative units as well as academic departments and colleges.

The Assessment Oversight Committee (AOC) was comprised of faculty and staff representatives from appropriate governance groups and administrative units (with members serving staggered multi-year terms to promote continuity). In addition, representatives were appointed by the vice chancellor for academic affairs and the student senate.

The AOC was charged with the responsibility of coordinating campus assessment activities, including periodically updating the assessment plan. In addition, the AOC was required to present an annual report to the faculty senate (with additional liaison with campus administration, the undergraduate curriculum commission, the academic planning council, and others). As appropriate, the AOC was obliged to interact with individual programs, colleges, etc., in providing feedback for curricular and administrative decision making processes.

Inventory of Campus Assessment Activities

While additional detail on the following activities can be provided, the purpose of this section is simply to identify key assessment activities developed over the past decade at UW-Platteville.

- In 1998 the assessment oversight committee and vice chancellor for academic affairs established the Assessment Activity Fund (AAF) to provide grant support for a wide variety of assessment projects. Approximately four to six assessment projects are funded annually (up to $3,000 each).
- In 1999 the AOC established a campus-based assessment journal as a forum for working papers, articles, reports, etc., related to a wide range of assessment topics.
- In 1998 the AOC funded the first in a series of efforts to develop home-grown assessment instruments. Refinement of the initial mathematics instrument continues.
- In 1999 the AOC funded the first in a series of interdisciplinary discussions within the liberal studies area in an effort to codify concerns within the social sciences. Faculty from seven social science disciplines participated in the discussions, which focused primarily on common issues dealt with within the institution's "cafeteria approach" to liberal studies. Subsequent discussions were funded in the humanities, fine arts, natural sciences, and historical perspectives areas of liberal studies. Participating faculty commented that the discussions were among the most valuable they'd experienced in more than twenty years of teaching at the college level—interdisciplinary dialogues that simply had never taken place prior to the AOC-funded project.
- The vice chancellor for academic affairs has maintained a special fund to support faculty participation in off-campus assessment conferences. Such encouragement relieves the financial burden otherwise placed on individual departments or colleges.
- The AOC has presented research findings (e.g., ACT-CAAP data analyses) to academic departments and governance groups in an effort to aid decision making processes.
- Members of the AOC have routinely presented "brown bag" discussions and in-service programs on specific topics within the assessment area.
- Most recently, the campus administration approved funding for a partial-release faculty position to coordinate the institution's general education program. The individual appointed to this position has also been given responsibilities in the area of assessment.

While this list is not exhaustive, it is representative of the sorts of assessment activities developed on campus over the last few years.

Assessment Relationships

A fundamental element of UW-Platteville's approach to assessment is that such activity must be *faculty-driven* (as opposed to driven by administrative edict). This premise was firmly established not only in the *assessment plan* (1995), but in the ongoing efforts made by individual faculty and academic programs as well.

The maintenance of the AAF and ongoing support–both moral and financial–from the vice chancellor for academic affairs have established a solid base from which to conduct assessment activities. Positive feedback from the University of Wisconsin System, The Higher Learning Commission, ETS, ACT, and other external bodies has reinforced the quality and quantity of assessment activities at UWP over the past decade.

The local commitment to administer ACT-CAAP every two years (rather than every four years, as mandated by the UW System) has also established ongoing assessment visibility on campus. The availability of longitudinal CAAP data provides impetus for additional research, including value-added assessment.

It is critical to note that virtually all of the assessment efforts undertaken in the past decade have been faculty-driven (evidenced by assessment activities that predate local or system-wide mandates). While the local administration has remained supportive of such efforts, it has also not stepped in to supplant faculty initiatives. In that regard, the creation of an assessment coordinator can be viewed as ongoing support of faculty efforts rather than as an attempt to administratively manage such activity. The individual appointed to this position (effective spring 2002) has been a key member of the AOC for several years. In addition, he was the first individual to receive an AAF grant to develop a home-grown assessment tool (in mathematics).

The evolution of a campus culture that not only supports assessment but that actively embraces it is not a simple task. This climate cannot develop as a result of administrative edict. A campus assessment culture must evolve over time, supported by an atmosphere that values both the efforts and the results of assessment. Assessment needs, processes, and results must be part of ongoing communication between faculty and administration (with inclusion of staff and students, as appropriate). Routine communication among governance groups and administrative units is also critical in maintaining assessment visibility on campus.

In summary, it is clear that assessment is "process, not product," an ongoing effort that reflects campus commitment to the principles of continuous improvement in our educational efforts. While administrative support is fundamental in maintaining this culture, the ongoing leadership of committed faculty is the key to this critical campus activity.

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Changing Your Faculty Culture to and Through Assessment

John Speary

The faculty culture at an institution of higher education reflects a good deal of tradition: the classroom priorities that are commonly held, the teaching methods that are generally utilized, the organizational strategies that are usually employed. Oftentimes, even younger faculty whose experience has been more short term will adhere to the same attitudes and assumptions as more seasoned faculty because the newer instructors were trained through the older systems embodied by their mentors. Meaningful, embedded assessment that steps back and examines candidly all dimensions of the learning process may not fit readily into the scheme of the existing faculty culture. Externally imposed programs of assessment that are seen to be peripheral to the central course level mission of teaching and learning will be met with widespread resistance and even subversion. For assessment to flourish as a productive complement to an existing instructional program, it must be accepted and even embraced by faculty as a crucial, integral, and beneficial element of the process through which they guide students in their learning journeys. The involvement of faculty throughout every aspect of an assessment program will change the faculty culture to and through assessment.

At Butler County Community College, assessment of student academic achievement began seven years ago amid a faculty culture that received it with responses ranging from passive indifference to hostile resistance. Presently, the varied multi-level assessment program at Butler enjoys general faculty involvement, support, and a great deal of enthusiasm. This paper will share lessons learned from the successful integration of assessment into the Butler faculty culture.

The Key to Faculty Buy-In

People tend to be resistant to change, particularly if they do not perceive the merit of that change and/or feel that the change is being imposed on them by other parties. As a teacher, I will not welcome a new approach to my work if I feel I have had no input in the selection or shaping of that new strategy. I have a sense of ownership of the culture in which I have long functioned. The disregard for that sense of ownership by agents outside my culture will make me uncomfortable, apprehensive, and probably defensive. However, if early on, I am welcomed into the generation of new ways of doing my present tasks, I will become more readily familiar, more engaged, and probably more enamored with those changes. Those changes will become integrated as part of my ongoing culture because I will have some sense of owning them from the outset. The key to faculty buy-in of assessment lies in promoting faculty ownership of assessment by embedding faculty involvement throughout the process.

Faculty involvement should be integral at all levels of the assessment process:

- Generation of institutional learning outcomes
- Creation and administration of departmental instructional assessment
- Creation and administration of institution-wide general education assessment
- Analysis of all assessment data
- Decision making and planning in response to assessment data

Faculty and Learning Outcomes

Meaningful institution-wide assessment can not take place unless it is founded on a scheme of commonly endorsed, desired learning outcomes. Any such learning outcomes will also be meaningless to a faculty unless they reflect the intents of coursework presently being offered at the institution. If the relevance of stated learning outcomes to current course offerings is not readily apparent, the faculty will probably ignore those institutional outcomes and continue on, secure with the status quo. Teachers often react to the whole issue of assessment as though assessment is inherently suggesting that they are not and have not been doing their jobs. If aspects of assessment such as institution-wide outcomes are imposed upon instructors without their input, the process is not showing appropriate respect to the faculty, and they will understandably be defensive and suspicious. No administrative body should ever decide on a set of global desired learning outcomes without careful and consistent consideration of the outcomes presently articulated and intentionally pursued in the ongoing curriculum. If faculty do not have input, then the global outcomes will be irrelevant, and efforts to assess them will be futile and result in nothing more than an unhappy bureaucratic exercise.

Institutional global learning outcomes should emanate from the outcomes and objectives already nurtured in the college's course offerings. Presumably, faculty have been responsible for the generation of course outcomes and objectives. If, then, faculty chaired committees with predominantly faculty membership distill out the essential global outcomes from the full range of existing course outcomes, the instructors as a whole will more readily see the feasibility and merit of assessing the achievement of those outcomes. Teachers should have input at all stages of the outcomes generation process.

Faculty and Departmental Assessment

As a teacher, I will find assessment worthwhile if it gives me feedback information about student learning that responds to questions I already have about the learning that is taking place in the courses I teach. What do I want to know about the learning that is taking place in the course sections I facilitate? As members of an instructional department, what do we want to know about the learning that is being achieved in our course offerings and degree programs?

When teachers have a say in the course outcomes that are to be assessed, they will be much more eager to administer the assessments and digest the data that the assessment yields. Also, if the assessment is looking at outcomes embedded in the existing courses, it follows that testing, projects, and other activities already part of the course should be able to serve as effective assessment instruments. Thus, assessment activities are already inherent in the course and need not be seen as peripherally imposed upon a course's busy schedule. Faculty are confronted with a great deal of subject matter that students need to experience and begin to understand. Particularly in traditionally scheduled courses, there is seemingly only a limited amount of contact time in which to facilitate the students' learning of the prescribed course content. If assessment activities seem to be robbing any of that time, then there will be a great deal of faculty resistance. Instructors are much more positive about assessment activities that arise out of ongoing aspects of the coursework.

Faculty and General Education Assessment

Most community college instructors are engaged in the day-to-day delivery of general education. They, therefore, have the most practical expertise to offer direction in the creation and administration of an assessment program examining student achievement of general education learning outcomes. There is wisdom in having a college's director of assessment come out of the ranks of the school's present faculty. While that individual will probably require specific training in preparation for the duties and release time in compensation for the time required for the task, a faculty director of assessment will demonstrate that assessment is operating as an integral part of the faculty culture. It is not an imposed, alien pursuit. The director's support body should consist primarily of other teachers who are representatives from the full breadth and depth of the college's instructional areas.

As on the departmental level, faculty will be most receptive to assessment instruments that naturally operate out of existing course activities. A highly effective general education assessment program can flourish using common assessment instruments generated by departmental faculty and administered throughout all sections of a variety of courses selected as representative of the college's full range of general education offerings. Rubrics used to score student achievement of learning outcomes will be most comprehensible and accessible to teachers if they themselves were responsible for the generation of those common rubrics. Faculty will own the data yielded in the assessment if they themselves scored the student work samples. A system that organizes an entire faculty into cross-disciplinary teams of scorers can complete a sizable representative assessment sample with a very reasonable amount of time and effort demand on any single individual. No one need feel that valuable irreplaceable time has been exploited. Still the yield will be great. Teachers who have generated the assessment instruments, created the standard rubrics, and scored the sample will be eager to analyze the data, confident in the data's relevance to what has taken place in their classrooms.

Faculty and Decision Making

Faculty own assessment data and its analysis when they have been engaged throughout the generation process. They will be anxious to see how what they have learned about student learning has an impact on planning and decision making at the departmental, divisional, and institutional levels. Assessment data and analysis should be on the agendas of faculty meetings with deans, deans' council meetings, administrative planning councils, and board of trustees meetings. It is critical for teachers to be engaged in meaningful conversation with administrators in all these venues about all decisions that affect learning (which presumably should be the majority of decisions made by a college). Faculty should be able to see the fruits of their assessment labors. Teachers must witness that assessment has an obvious impact on the college's administrative decisions and operation. If this final critical step of assessment is incomplete, then the result will be faculty distrust in the merit of the whole assessment mechanism.

Features of Assessment Programs That Promote Faculty Buy-in

- All college administrators, particularly those most directly involved with learning activities, must be actively supportive and obviously conversant with the assessment program. However, they also need to let faculty take leading roles in the generation and operation of that program.
- Because time is a critical commodity for all teachers, release time and subsidized training need to be provided for all faculty who will be involved with assessment. This time may simply be in the form of in-service time allotted for assessment training, scoring, and/or analysis. However, the college should probably consider making more substantial provisions for those faculty who will lead the assessment process.
- All faculty, both full-time and part-time, need to know what is happening in assessment. Regular communication through announcements and presentations at meetings, periodic newsletters, and e-mail will serve to keep the whole faculty abreast of the progress and significance of the assessment program.
- The inclusion of an explanation of the college's assessment program in the faculty handbook speaks loudly about the presence of assessment as a part of the faculty culture.
- If there is a regular timeline for assessment that includes its discussion as a regular agenda item in meetings between faculty and administrators, faculty will have confidence that assessment is impacting the operation of the college outside their classrooms.
- Regular faculty representation on the college's budgeting and planning bodies serves as an effective tool for consideration of assessment data in all institutional decisions.

A Crucial Strategy

In the ongoing pursuit of productive assessment, there will be many instructors who are resistant and grudging about their participation. However, there will be many who readily see the potential for improving learning. These natural supporters must be sought out, recognized, and encouraged fervently. The advancement of an assessment program can benefit greatly from a rather old-fashioned evangelistic approach to persuasion. One person who is thoroughly persuaded about the benefits of commitment to any given concept becomes a powerful spokesperson to others, thereby convincing them to also embrace that concept. This old marketing strategy has been called "each one bring one." It has worked well for building involvement in church youth education programs. It can also work wonders with exponential growth in faculty enthusiasm for participation in assessment. As ardent supporters bear witness to the good that comes from putting assessment into practice, their enthusiasm will help bring others alongside in the effort. People respond much more readily to another individual sharing their conviction, one on one and face to face. This approach is much more effective than presenting assessment to faculty through yet another pitch or, worse yet, pronouncement as they sit as part of an impersonal mass at a meeting.

Cultivation and celebration of assessment champions encourages those individuals to move throughout the larger faculty and spread the good news of assessment's benefits for learning. Individual faculty convinced that assessment does make a very positive difference will influence the transformation of the faculty culture. Any college can have a faculty culture that embraces assessment as a crucial means of improving student learning.

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Faculty Involvement and Commitment: The Key to Successful Academic Achievement Assessment

Nancy Thannert
Chris Jones

Introduction

Robert Morris College (RMC) is a private two- and four-year degree-granting institution that serves approximately six thousand students from Chicago and its surrounding areas. Students are primarily first-generation college students. While the majority of classes are held on the Chicago, Orland Park, and Springfield campuses, classes and major areas of study are also offered at the newer campuses in Bensenville and DuPage County.

Initially, the college's main goal was to develop an NCA-approved assessment plan. In addition to this goal, the college wanted to gain faculty involvement and commitment to this process. The first step in reaching these two goals was to understand the expectations and requirements that NCA had for assessment. Following this step, there was a need to recognize the institution's organizational structure and culture. RMC accomplished both of these steps and reached its goals of a viable assessment plan and process. As a result of meeting these goals, RMC gained not only faculty involvement and commitment, but also institutional change as well.

It must be noted that there is no right way to develop an assessment plan. So much depends on the institution's organization and culture. The purpose of this discussion is to help institutions realize the need to design an assessment plan that is right for them. Specifically, the discussion will focus on the need for faculty to be involved and committed in initiating and implementing assessment outcomes, evaluating students' achievement of those outcomes, and finally, using the results to make recommendations for curricula and institutional changes.

Development and Implementation of an Assessment Methodology

Starting in 1991-92, the main hurdle the college faced in developing an assessment program was to overcome the faculty's negative perception of it. Faculty initially viewed the process as being void of value and saw it both as a waste of their time and as a means of individual retribution. It was perceived as one more task they must incorporate into their already full schedules. In order to gain their support, the college saw the need to develop an "open system" assessment program that met NCA guidelines. The first step in gaining faculty involvement was to have their input into the creation of outcome statements in the various areas of communication, critical thinking/problem solving, and degree-specific areas of study. The next step was to have the faculty craft each course's outline and objectives along with specific assignments that assessed certain academic skills (e.g., critical thinking, oral and written communication). In addition, it was crucial for faculty to develop rubrics that are used to assess students' outcomes on these particular skills. After the creation and development of the assessment framework, students' work was collected. From the beginning, assignment collection has been a random process, with the only stipulation being that work is collected at both the associate degree level and the baccalaureate degree level. The rationale for this type of collection is to have representative samples in order to make comparisons between degree levels to determine students' academic improvement.

Data collection is done throughout the assessment cycle of six quarters from several capstone courses or comprehensive exams, with faculty knowledge and consent. At annual assessment meetings, individual committees are formed based on academic skills (e.g., critical thinking). All faculty are involved in these meetings. The objective of these meetings is to evaluate students' achievements using the faculty-generated rubrics. From these assessment results, the committees engage in writing reports that highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the students' outcomes. As of 1995-96, all student academic achievement committee reports are then aggregated into one institutional annual report. This "grand" report is then shared with all faculty members. Concerns are addressed at curricula meetings, where they are used as an impetus for the improvement of programmatic content, syllabi, and course-specific assignments. Budget requests to address faculty concerns are incorporated into each committee's report. Examples of budgetary requests range from new software or equipment to securing external speakers who contribute to and enhance students' learning. Modifications by the faculty may be made to the assessment process, rubric, etc. The goal is to ensure that the faculty perceive the assessment as adding value to the teaching-learning process. These assignments are then used for the next year's data collection.

Outcomes of the Assessment Process

There have been several positive outcomes to the assessment process at RMC. Faculty have become aware of the purpose of assessment, which is to assess the college's curricula and ultimately the skills of the student. This has allowed for the negative connotation of assessment to dissipate. Furthermore, the assessment loop has been closed. Faculty on all campuses have knowledge of the results (both strengths and concerns) and are given the opportunity to suggest changes in the process. Faculty have also seen the benefits of assessment in the classroom. Rigor in the curricula has increased, and the students are acquiring, developing, and improving their academic skills. From a pedagogical standpoint, teachers have improved their instructional methods to address any assessment concerns. The last major outcome area has been institutional change. The college uses its academic council as a forum to openly discuss the overall assessment report and its process. Both sitting members of the council (who rotate on a regular basis) and faculty members can raise issues of concern. This allows for a healthy debate on what the college should be assessing, how it should be assessing it, and what it should do with the results. The college, in addition, has established an institutional assessment steering committee. This committee (which has members from all arenas of the college) is responsible for compiling the results of indirect measures of student academic achievement and the annual report based on the faculty assessment reports. It reviews and discusses all assessment reports and makes suggestions to the college based on them.

Final Observations and Conclusions

The adoption of an assessment plan at RMC has led to many positive changes for the faculty and the college. Faculty have become involved in the process and view it now as an essential part of their academic identity. They use assessment as a framework in presenting course material and designing course assignments. It is through this commitment that faculty have improved their teaching methods, increased the rigor of their curricula, and raised the scholastic skills of their students.

From an institutional standpoint, the adoption of an assessment program has allowed RMC to raise itself to Level Two based on the "Levels of Implementation" document provided by the Commission. Internally, assessment has changed the structure and culture of the college. Standing committees (i.e., academic council, institutional assessment steering committee) exist that openly discuss assessment results and develop strategies to address any weaknesses or concerns with student performances. In addition, assessment has gone from a top-down administered process to a faculty driven one. This type of process has contributed to cultural changes. Specifically, assessment has and will continue to be an evolutionary process with the main goal of meeting the needs of the students, the faculty, and the college. Incorporating such a process has reinforced faculty involvement and commitment. The faculty understand that they have a voice in any and all steps of the assessment process. This knowledge allows them to freely give input and make any suggestions about modifications. The end result has been that faculty no longer view assessment as a valueless chore, but rather as a beneficial and necessary responsibility. Furthermore, faculty see it as a means of improving classroom instruction, their institutional surroundings, and ultimately the learning environment of the student.

As an institution that has grown into assessment, we offer several suggestions. It is key to make faculty involvement the main goal of developing an assessment program. Faculty need to be involved in planning and developing the assessment outcomes that will be used in assessing students' work. This benefits the faculty in giving them insight into how they should design objectives and assignments in their classes, as well as improving institutional curricula. Faculty also need to be continually involved in the actual assessment of students' work. This allows them to see whether students are meeting the outcomes, and how other programs are assessing student academic achievement.

Finally, the loop needs to be closed by conveying the results (both positive and negative) back to the faculty in a timely manner. This permits changes and suggestions for improvement to be made about curricula and the institution. The end result of using such a plan is not only faculty commitment, but it also creates a cooperative and robust environment. In connection with an assessment program, creating institutional committees (e.g., academic council, assessment steering committee) is recommended. These committees allow an appropriate outlet for faculty to raise and discuss concerns about assessment or any institutional issue. These types of committees also allow for any feedback to be given to faculty about these matters. Again, this contributes to and enhances the positive culture of a school. In summary, however it is accomplished, faculty commitment to assessment, which is a direct result of faculty involvement with the assessment process, is a must for any institution.

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How to Change a Habit: Motivating Students for Successful Assessment

Mary Ann Bazile
Janice Collins

Introduction

In 1967 Neely Gardner (Bruce and Wyman 1998) put forth his premise that organizations do not really change, only the people in them change. If the people do not change through some process of reeducating themselves, then the organization cannot really change. Working through the guiding principles of a learning college, the administrators, faculty, staff, and students at Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, have embarked on an organizational change process as a result of assessment of student academic achievement. To motivate students for successful assessment, we draw on social marketing strategies that empower students to progress toward adopting and maintaining behavior change for optimal learning. Because behavioral change does not occur overnight but instead occurs over a period of time, the stage construct is an important part of change. The model suggests that people move from *precontemplation,* not intending to change; to *contemplation,* intending to change in the near future; to *preparation,* actively planning change; to *action,* overtly making changes; and into *maintenance,* taking steps to sustain change and resist efforts to fall back into old behaviors. In due time, the old habit of perceiving testing and grades as evidence of learning, is replaced with the new habit of displaying performance assessments and reflection as proof of learning.

Precontemplation: Students Are Not Aware of Assessment Measures

Other than learners who were required to save "good examples" of their work in grades K-8 or who have already attended a college that required portfolios or other evidence of learning, most learners coming into our colleges in the Midwest do not know what the term *assessment* means. If one were analyzing the situation, it could be considered more tragic, however, that instructors and counselors at colleges with an assessment plan may also not know what this academic assessment "thing" is–this portfolio requirement "thing" or why the college is moving to some periodic standardized tests. At times, staff and students at Moraine Park have commented, "What do you mean, grades aren't the only thing? They are everything!" Or instructors have asserted, "Of course they learned; they passed my class!"

Awareness versus denial. Learners go through much the same process that we, college instructors, administration, and staff have gone through when it comes to awareness of assessment of student academic achievement. While we would hope that students at our colleges fit into Phase II–Pre-Awareness or Phase III–Awareness, it is more likely that many students are still in Phase I–Denial. They deny that assessment can be or is happening, and they are positive that it is happening only at this college. So the realization that many learners are probably still in the denial stage when it comes to assessment should not be too disturbing when considering that many instructors and staff members may also be said to be in denial that the assessment process is a requirement for all of us!

Possible indicators of the two phases that can precede awareness and acceptance of assessment include:

Phase I: Denial

- It (assessment) doesn't affect me.
- My instructor says, "This, too, shall pass; it is an academic fad."

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- Assessment? Okay, but you can't require learners to do anything.
- Write it in the Handbook, but that's as far as we need to go.
- I'm not worried; my instructors haven't said anything about assessment.

Phase II: Pre-Awareness

- Can't get away from the word *assessment*. See it everywhere—the classroom, the Internet, the hall monitors, headers, footers—but still don't think it applies to me.
- My instructor told us not to worry; the instructor will submit something for the whole class, and that will take care of assessment.
- I'm getting a little worried; someone pointed out recently that assessment might affect me.
- I heard I am going to have to do something for assessment in order to graduate.
- Today someone from *Assessment* came into our classes, and it looks like I *have* to do something with assessment in order to graduate.

Phase III: Awareness

- My counselor mentioned that I would need to do a portfolio or something for this assessment requirement.
- I received a brochure about assessment in the mail after I registered.
- My instructors are talking to us about assessment, even though I think some of them don't really get it.
- Someone from Assessment has been coming into my classes and talking about assessment, saying it is a graduation requirement.
- Yes, I'll serve on the college's assessment committee.
- Yes, you may share my portfolio with the advisory committee.

Contemplation: Students Become Aware of Assessment Measures

During this stage of the change process, consciousness-raising strategies help students become aware of performance assessment and the portfolio requirement. Students find and learn new facts, ideas, and tips to support a behavior change. Consciousness-raising uses the educational process and incorporates methods to influence knowledge; change attitudes; and influence skills, capability, and self-efficacy.

A great challenge to outcome assessment is to identify the strategy that will most likely produce the best results, based on both participation and trying one's best. Ideally, outcome assessment that is not coercive should produce good results. To achieve this end, a number of basic steps have been successful at Moraine Park Technical College. Essentially, these steps can be summarized in one word: *Communicate!* These basic steps are as follows:

- **Develop and distribute an explanatory brochure.** Our college brochure, "Assessment, It's Not Just Tests Any More," shows students why they should participate and how the results relate to their own educational development. It clearly explains the rationale for assessment for both students and the institution. Since a portfolio is used, the brochure explains its content, purpose, and intended uses.

- **Use campus media broadly.** We use *Tech Talk*, the weekly student newsletter, to publish reminders about the assessment process and to offer tips on developing artifacts, writing reflection statements, and compiling portfolios. Shorter messages are periodically displayed on hallway TV monitors. Articles and editorials in the student newspaper or newsletter can positively affect student motivation. Student testimonies and statements by student leaders can influence positive student involvement. This approach, if well orchestrated, can motivate students. A challenge here is to find those students committed to outcome assessment and encourage their involvement in persuading others of the merits of portfolio development.

- **Send letters to students.** Early in each semester, the Outcome Assessment Office sends a letter to new students. This letter not only welcomes them to Moraine Park, but also informs them about the college assessment process and offers resources to answer questions. Letters to students from the president, other administrators (in our case, the outcome assessment associate), and students' counselors or program advisors can help create a positive attitude about assessment. Although a single letter may be helpful, several strategically timed letters can be even more effective.

- **Extend personal contacts.** Although letters are helpful, at Moraine Park we believe that personal contact by program faculty is even more effective. Such personal involvement underscores the importance of assessment and stresses the value of students taking assessment seriously. A comprehensive contact model might include one or more mailings from key college persons, followed up by phone calls from those who relate personally to the students. The challenge in initiating personal contacts is the time needed by faculty to carry out this strategy. This barrier may be reduced with the use of e-mail or setting up a mentoring program.

- **Provide faculty support in the classroom.** Faculty can strongly influence student motivation by their attitudes, in-class comments, and use of active learning experiences and by giving constructive feedback on performance. If faculty visibly support outcome assessment, they can contribute much toward the development of a positive assessment climate on campus. To achieve this end, faculty must have staff development opportunities so that they can continuously improve the learning process.

- **Establish checkpoints.** Checkpoints are strategically placed marketing techniques or reminders that keep both faculty and students on track in the outcome assessment process. When striving to achieve organizational or personal change, it is wise to pause periodically to take stock or evaluate what has been achieved and what still needs to be done to reach a goal. A checkpoint can follow up on earlier communications about portfolio development using various campus media, mail, or phone calls. We have found that the more personal the reminder, the higher the level of motivation may be expected.

- **Offer feedback.** Students are more likely to commit to outcome assessment if they are informed about the results. If they are tested or, as at Moraine Park, participate in a portfolio assessment activity or a survey, they would like to know how well they performed. Feedback on individual performance is an important principle of outcome assessment. If students participate in surveys, focus groups, and the like, they will likely appreciate a summary statement of the findings, and it may well influence future willingness to cooperate.

- **Present benefits.** Students may be motivated to participate in assessment and do their best if the benefits of the assessment process are clearly communicated. Emphasizing that the assessment portfolio can also be used as a career portfolio to be presented to a potential employer may enhance students' motivation to participate in assessment. For this method to be most effective, an institution needs to offer career services as a vital part of the assessment process. Student participation in assessment should be treated as a routine, integral part of attending the institution, rather than a special project requiring extra effort. One way to routinize broad-based assessment is to assist students with converting the assessment portfolio into a presentation or career portfolio, which may ensure that students will take assessment seriously.

- **Bestow rewards.** Because portfolio assessment is a requirement for graduation at Moraine Park, direct rewards for submitting a portfolio would not be appropriate. The college does present a certificate in recognition of achievement for outstanding work on the assessment portfolio. The benefits of introducing direct rewards for participation in our assessment process are being discussed. Consideration is given to recognition of achievement: special dean's list, published list of top 10 percent of students showing academic growth, news releases for newspapers, and an invitation to be introduced to the program advisory committee. At an upcoming *Portfolio Expo* of student artifacts, we are considering awards or incentives such as scholarships, bookstore gift or textbook certificates, tickets to a special event, a dinner, and a lottery for a computer or other electronic device. It is suggested that a reward approach involve student leaders throughout the planning stage. Rewards that faculty and administrators consider desirable may be viewed differently by students.

Preparation to Change: Students Intend to Take Action

We all know that it can take a long time to change a culture, a way of thinking, and the behavior of inhabitants of a culture. We also know that change is a fact of organizational life and that most of us do not decide whether to change but rather how to make the changes work. In his book, *Supervision,* Samuel C. Certo states:

> People's resistance to change is greatest when they are not sure what to expect or why the change is necessary. Change stirs up fear of the unknown, a human response. Furthermore, when people do not understand the reasons for change, the effort to change does not seem worthwhile. (Certo 1997, 449).

In education, we have been depending upon grades as our barometers of learning for many, many years. Now we are being required to consider and accept that grades alone are not enough proof that learners can perform, or that teachers did their job and taught learners cognitive, motor, and other skills. We now need to accept that even better than grades is actual proof that learners have learned, something tangible–artifacts of learning.

Another realization. There are learners and staff in our educational environments who are applauding this change. There are learners who are saying, "Yes, finally. I've wanted an opportunity to 'show' potential employers or another college what I can do, rather than what I know." There are also instructors out there who agree that it is "about time!" These are instructors who have always embraced the capstone projects, the hands-on assessments, the internship portfolios, etc.

So what are the stages of preparing for a change? Kurt Lewin, a noted behavioral scientist, helps us out with his model for implementing change. His three phases are:

1. Unfreezing: People recognize a need for change.
2. Changing: People begin trying to behave differently.
3. Refreezing: The new behavior becomes part of people's regular processes. (Cited in Certo 1997, 450)

Lewin's model makes two assumptions about the change process:

1. Before a change can occur, people must see the status quo as less than ideal.
2. When people begin changing, the organization must provide a way for the new behavior to become established practice.

Establishing new behaviors. Realizing that status quo would be less than ideal and in fact would not work, Moraine Park set up a cross-functional (representatives from all units of the college) project team to determine the "how" of this change, drew up a model, and prepared for the implementation of assessment of student academic achievement. To address learner awareness of the change, the team decided to start with common ground in introducing assessment to learners and chose to modify the curriculum for the Student Success Course, a required course for all program students early in their chosen program (first semester). The modification included introductory competencies about assessment of student achievement and reflection of growth in performance by students. We then modified Career Development (a required course near the end of a student's program of study) to include competencies that require learners to gather their artifacts of learning, relate them to the established expected program outcomes, include evidence of performing general education outcomes, and organize their reflections statements for the entire collection of artifacts (their representation of the skills they can perform after completing their program).

Action: Students Change Behavior

In the action stage of the behavior change process, students participate in producing artifacts for their portfolios. Submitting assessment portfolios as a requirement for graduation from a program went into effect for those students enrolling in a program in August 2000. Initially, we facilitated this process by supplying students with binders, section dividers, and the like, or computer disks with electronic templates for their portfolios. We no longer provide these supplies due to budget constraints and because current students viewed this as "squelching their creativity." So that students can track their progress with portfolio development, we devised student completion checklists or worksheets that are specific for each program. These worksheets identify program and general education learner outcomes as well as indicators of achievement in core abilities. In addition, the checklists indicate the criteria that must be included in the portfolios: artifact(s) linked to each outcome, reflection statements, and evidence of growth or progress.

Currently we are seeking to motivate student participation in the assessment process by planning a Portfolio Expo, a special event at which students in the Career Development course can exhibit their portfolios for other students, staff, families, and members of advisory committees.

We are also establishing a student-run assessment center on each campus. The centers will incorporate a student mentoring program linked to the student senate. We believe that these efforts are vital to motivate both participation and trying one's best in assessment.

Maintenance: Students' Behavior Change Becomes Routine

Working to prevent falling back into old behaviors is the focus of the maintenance stage. People in this stage have continued the new behavior for an extended period of time and are increasingly more confident that they can continue their changes. The student's change has become more of a habit, and the chance of falling back into old behaviors is diminished, but it still requires attention. To promote assessment as routine and encourage learners to talk about assessment, we plan to conduct annual *Portfolio Expos,* offer a student mentoring program, and continue with regular student training sessions. To support these maintenance efforts, we offer ongoing staff development opportunities. Our goal is for students know that assessment is required and to come to Moraine Park because it is required!

We recognize that when our organizational change process reaches this stage, it will be important for us to critically analyze and evaluate assessment data in the form of student feedback collected from not only the portfolio process but also from student surveys and focus groups.

Conclusion

Motivating students may be complex and difficult, but it is not impossible. There are no simple answers to the question, "How do we motivate students?" Each institution must find the answers most appropriate for the populations it serves. Those involved in assessment must listen to each other and be willing to make adjustments when required. At the same time, it is important to stick to basic principles of the college plan and work steadily toward the goal of improving student learning, student development, and overall institutional effectiveness.

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Institutional Strategies Beyond Institutional Structures: Organizing Assessment Development Efforts Around Departments and Department Chairs

Charles R. Pastors

What often initiates campus-wide assessment initiatives is accreditation or public or political demands for accountability (Banta 2001, 3). Still, initiatives don't have an uneventful movement to implementation. Many stakeholders of the existing curriculum and curriculum evaluation processes are tied to tradition and habit. It is familiar and comfortable, and has been seen as "working" for generations. It's "easy," since faculty have been teaching this way since their first class, and it allows them to be flexible during each course—often leading to exam construction in light of what has been covered, rather than what was to have been learned. It is easily processed by a bureaucratically structured faculty and administrative system. Material is covered; exams are given on that material; student performance (grades) can be documented and justified. Credits can be accumulated, leading to measurable rates of student retention and graduation. Explanations for students who fall away are comfortably directed to those who leave—lack of ability, effort, etc. As reported by Michael J. Strada (2001, 44), a 1999 study showed that only 24 percent of institutions report that faculty involved in governance are very supportive of assessment activities. Strada also cites an earlier (1996) survey listing fear of the unknown, plus already heavy workloads, as contributing to faculty resistance to assessment initiatives.

As Abraham Zaleznik (1992) stated in 1977, "an inherent conservatism dominates the culture of large organizations." He quotes John D. Rockefeller III:

> An organization is a system, with a logic of its own, and all the weight of tradition and inertia. The deck is stacked in favor of the tried and proven way of doing things and against the taking of risks and striking out in new directions. (Zaleznik 1992, 126)

Against these forces, proponents of assessment in institutions of higher education, whether external or internal, turn to the heads of academic units to institute assessment within their departments and programs. Department heads are asked to lead the efforts needed to transform the institution. Yet, response is at best uneven, and at worst sketchy.

The focus of this paper is to ask if the assumption of a residual pool of leadership in heads of academic departments and programs is mistaken. The distinction between the manager and leader is made throughout business and organization literature. (See, in addition to Zaleznik, frequent articles in *Leadership in Action*, *OD Practitioner*, and *Training*, and "The 4 Roles of Leadership" workshops offered by FranklinCovey.)

Without going into details here, managers solve problems. They adopt impersonal, passive attitudes toward goals, and those goals come from necessity rather than desire. Their focus on survival allows them to tolerate mundane work. They seek order and control. Leaders are active, shaping rather than responding. Mundane tasks tend to drive them crazy. They have a tolerance for lack of structure. "Leaders . . . may work in organizations, but they never belong to them" (Zaleznik 1992, 132).

"This leader-manager distinction is important for the practice of organization development" (Burke 1995, 15), and it also should be important in a higher education organization attempting to move to a culture and process of assessment at all levels of its operation. If all department and program heads need to be managers, not all of them will be leaders. For an institution to place its assessment future solely or primarily in the hands of the traditional academic units and their heads would be an institutional gamble of a high order.

Thus, it is of some importance to determine whether there is any meaningful relationship between the leader/manager role perception of heads of academic units and the level of response of those units to the call to develop and implement meaningful assessment plans and processes. Generally stated, the hypothesis of this study is that units headed by leaders will be more responsive to that charge, while units headed by managers will at best be nearly passive, and at worst resistant. If the proposed relationship exists, institutions and institutional leaders desiring real assessment as a useful tool for measuring their achievement of mission will have to look elsewhere to find mechanisms for its development and application.

Methodology

At the start of the fall 2001 term, as part of a development of a pilot chairs' evaluation instrument, the chairs and coordinators[1] of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northeastern Illinois University were asked to list what tasks, activities, duties, etc., they thought made up the "job of the chair." Most chairs responded, and their listings were compiled. Almost no editing was done (although obviously duplicate items were only listed once), so there were numerous overlaps of individual items. The resulting fifty-three items were scored for this project as operationalizing "leader," "leader/manager," or "manager" conceptions of the chair's job. All chairs responding were then scored on their individual listings according to their particular listing responses. Chairs and coordinators who hadn't responded were scored by this author according to observations and activities over the January 2000–December 2001 two-year period. The scoring of the twenty-three individuals yielded three who viewed their task under the "leader" model, nine who saw it as "leader/manager," and eleven who viewed their job as "manager."

In June 2001, all chairs in the college had been evaluated by the dean and had been rated in their job performance for the past year as having performed at an "exceptional," "above," "at," or "below" job-performance level. Current chairs (starting too recently to be evaluated at that time) and coordinators were scored by this author according to observations and activities over the 2001 year. Here, the evaluation of the twenty-three individuals produced nine at "exceptional" or "above;" eight "at;" and six "below" performance expectations.

These two independent variables would be linked to the dependent variable–the level of development and implementation of departmental assessment plans. Information on those plans, reported as of mid-December 2001, was used by this author to score those plans as being at a "low," "medium," or "high" level of development. Of the twenty-three assessment plans, three were rated "low," nine "medium," and eleven "high." (These terms are relative, with actual levels running from virtually no assessment plan at all to plans that were fairly completely developed but had yet to be implemented fully and applied to the curriculum.)

Analysis and Implications for Assessment Implementation

Not surprisingly, chairs' and coordinators' ratings on their performance evaluation scale and on their leader/manager role perception dimension were highly positively correlated, with a Tau/b=.6. While leadership valuing and performance would be an important component of the job of chairing an academic department, much of what departmental heads do comprises the day-to-day and term-to-term operation of the unit and its faculty.

Each of those independent variables was then correlated with the level of development of the assessment plan implemented in their department. The results support the hypothesis proposed by this study. Both measures were positively correlated with assessment progress, but the relationship with the leadership measure (Tau/b=.55) was much stronger than that with the job performance evaluation (Tau/b=.39).

It isn't surprising that "It takes leadership to create a culture and activity of assessment." What is revealing is that, if you look for that leadership only, or primarily in the persons of those heading academic departments or programs, you will be frustrated in your search on at least two fronts. First, it isn't likely that even the majority of those individuals will consider their job to be primarily that of leadership. Requests to lead will not be taken seriously by those who see the department chair's job as that of managing. Further, they will likely not devote their first attention or highest energies to that leadership task. What they see as their primary responsibility–running (managing) the department–will occupy their time and their attention.

Second, those who would respond to the call to lead in this activity must first still do the time-consuming work demanded by their management tasks. Running the department is a major part of their job; it takes a predominant amount of their time; and it is likely what their colleagues expect them to be doing. Thus, even leaders who head departments may be unable to take on that function *on top of* what they already have to do to manage their departments satisfactorily. Asked to lead, and thwarted in their efforts to respond, they may even withdraw from the task in frustration, become more dissatisfied with the position of department chair, and seek the earliest possible time to leave it.

If department chairs on their own can't create a campus-wide culture and activity of assessment, to whom can those who wish those outcomes turn? First, those chairs who do see their job as leading must be identified, encouraged, and supported to take leadership in assessment. However, opportunities must be provided for giving them meaningful "out-of-chair" experiences–through professional development opportunities pointed toward assessment, and through participation in meaningful faculty governance activities that are taking the lead in developing assessment plans and procedures. In the latter, they can meet and work with other leaders, reinforce their own commitment to the importance of leadership, and find external validation of their commitment to that component of their self-image as chair and in their role on their campus and in their departments.

Second, others who can lead in assessment efforts must be tapped. Leaving to chance their presence on central faculty groups handed the assessment charge (that is, to the vagaries of election results to those bodies) is risky. Appointment of bodies exterior to those in existence specifically charged with developing assessment may be effective, but the problems of institutional acceptance of a changed culture and affiliated values and practices remains to be addressed successfully. Certainly, such a body cannot itself implement and institutionalize assessment in any real ongoing fashion.

Third, the engagement of adjunct faculty must be addressed–especially where a significant portion of general education offerings are staffed by non-tenure-track faculty. During the fall 2001 term, NEIU's College of Arts and Sciences began a program called "Take the Assessment Challenge," designed for part-time faculty. Three sets of three-part workshops were available. Using the Second Edition of Angelo and Cross *Classroom Assessment Techniques,* and working in teams of four or five guided by tenure-track faculty experienced in using classroom assessment, twenty-three part-time faculty developed revised syllabi for use in their courses during the spring 2002 term. To be eligible for $250 assessment development grants, each participant incorporated at least two classroom assessments and one course assessment into their course. Upon implementation of those revisions during the spring 2002 term and submission of an "impact report" on their use of assessment, participants would be eligible for a $100 assessment implementation grant. Those workshops are to be scheduled for later in the spring 2002 term.

The final point of initiative for successful assessment on an institution-wide basis requires engagement in that process of those faculty who see leadership as a meaningful part of their contribution to the academic community. They may already be serving on various faculty or administrative advisory bodies. They may be seen innovating in their classrooms. They may be seen again and again at special activities or events relating to the academic pulse of the institution. A place must be found for those leaders at the assessment development table. They have much to offer to the quality of the activity; they are the ones likely to take the idea and activity on as their own and to carry it about the university. And they are invaluable as modelers of assessment at all levels, thus helping to transform the institution's culture.

Notes

[1] At NEIU some departments were "merged" several years ago. "Merged" departments have a common chair. Sub-units are headed by a coordinator. Coordinators perform many of the tasks of chairs, but they are not evaluated by the dean.

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Part 2
Improving Student Learning

Chapter 8
Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Tools of Assessment

The Higher Learning Commission

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Portfolios: Proceed with Caution

Gloria M. Rogers
Julia Williams

Introduction

Portfolios can provide an extremely rich source of data for the enhancement of student learning in ways that locally developed surveys and questionnaires and nationally normed tests cannot. With portfolios, institutions have control over the design, context, format, and analysis that can provide authentic, direct measures of institution-specific student learning outcomes. However, portfolios have been severely criticized by those who initially had a vision for their potential and were later disappointed in the results of the implementation. The source of these failures lies primarily in three elements: the portfolio design, implementation, and analysis of data were not carefully thought through before the decision to adopt portfolios was made. In order to ensure successful implementation of a portfolio system, faculty and administrators should consider the following questions before deciding to try portfolios:

- What is the focus of the assessment?
- What is the scope of assessment?
- What learning objectives will be measured?
- What is the role of faculty and students?
- Should the portfolio be electronic or paper based?
- How are the portfolios going to be assessed?
- How are the results going to be linked to the curriculum?

Focus of Assessment

The first consideration needs to be whether portfolio results will be used to assess individual students or student cohorts (e.g., graduating seniors, freshmen, all students in a particular major, etc.). This decision depends on how the results are going to be used and will, as a result, affect other aspects of the portfolio process. For example, if the focus of assessment is individual students for the purpose of pass/fail, grades, or advancement into or out of a program, then the level of specificity of the learning expectation and analysis of results will need to be rigorous (high-stakes assessment). Consideration will also need to be given as to who places artifacts in the student's portfolio. Those who implement portfolios should realize that they must determine the level of involvement of students in their own assessment. If students are asked to make decisions about what to place in their portfolios, for example, they will require instruction and individual guidance in the submission of learning artifacts. In addition, learning outcomes will need to be explicit and rating rubrics clearly written with appropriate scoring levels; all of this information must also be shared with students. If faculty are going to place materials in student portfolios, consideration will need to be given to the alignment of instruction to desired student learning outcomes. Instructional faculty will need to be involved in the development of the scoring rubrics and learning objectives to maximize their "buy-in" into the portfolio process.

Scope of Assessment

Another design consideration is the scope of the assessment. Portfolios can be designed to assess the growth of an individual student over time (longitudinal assessment). This would require ratings of a number of student artifacts over time to evaluate individual student progress. These artifacts are generally chosen by the instructor, who determines which classroom artifacts are best aligned with the learning objectives of an assignment, test, or project.

Another approach is to ask students to submit what they believe to be their best work on given outcomes and to score their entries to determine their level of competence toward a learning objective (showcase approach). If the focus of assessment is on student cohorts, portfolios of a cohort of students can be sampled (using valid sampling techniques) and scored to determine whether program or institutional student outcomes are being met. The rubrics used in assessing cohorts may not have the same degree of specificity as those used in a classroom setting, where the results have a higher stake. In addition to these two models, a hybrid approach may also be taken. If a showcase approach is to be taken, snapshots of an electronic portfolio can be taken over time to document or benchmark the progress of cohorts toward achieving desired outcomes. This information can be used as formative information to consider improvements that might need to be made in progress toward achieving the desired learning objectives and is an example of how a showcase design can also be used in a comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of the growth of a cohort of students.

Measurable Learning Objectives[1]

The development of measurable learning objectives is the most crucial aspect of any assessment process. This is particularly true in the implementation of a portfolio process. Once the focus and scope of the portfolio has been determined, significant time must be spent discussing what desired learning outcomes are going to be assessed. Once there is a consensus on the learning outcomes, rubrics consistent with the desired levels of achievement must be developed and communicated to both students and those involved in instruction. In the case of program or institutional assessment, it is necessary to communicate and achieve consensus from the broader base of faculty. This is not a trivial process but one that will develop a common sense of what is important at the institutional/program level and should be reflected in the core or required curriculum. Once measurable learning objectives have been determined, the rest of the development becomes more apparent (Rogers and Sando 1996).

Role of Faculty and/or Students

To enhance the likelihood of success during the implementation process, it is important to make the role of faculty and students explicit. It is especially important to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" When designing the portfolio process, be sure that there is a focus on making the process as non-intrusive as possible. Some of the decisions that need to be made include the following:

- Who will make the submissions to the portfolio–faculty or students?
- Who will score the portfolios? How often?
- Will students get "credit" for their portfolio?
- Will the submissions be required as part of a class or program?
- Will students be asked to reflect on the portfolio entries that they make? If so, will they get feedback on the quality of their reflections?
- If portfolios are being used to assess cohorts instead of individual students, will the students get feedback on their portfolios?

Electronic or Paper

An important process decision is whether the portfolio will be electronic or paper-based. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. Paper-based portfolios can be difficult to manage, especially at the program or institutional level. Access for students and faculty can be problematic, and scoring and analysis time-consuming. In addition, if the student would like to maintain her portfolio, there is no easy way for both the student and the institution to keep track of it. However, for classroom assessment, the paper-based portfolio may be easier for student and faculty consultation and review. In comparison to the paper-based portfolio, an electronic portfolio has the following potential advantages:

- Allows for asynchronous use for both student and faculty
- Minimizes administrative processes that can be overwhelming in a paper-based system
- Provides for student-controlled access (other than faculty raters and advisers)

- Provides the ability to archive student material in multi-media format
- Offers use of search strategies for easy access to artifacts
- Makes updating entries easy
- Allows faculty scoring results to be automatically logged and aggregated for analysis
- Provides students with feedback online

Disadvantages of electronic portfolios include the lack of expertise that may be available to develop the electronic platform. Although most campuses have information technologists and computer scientists working on institutional projects, it is difficult to get the dedicated support that this might require. There are currently a number of commercial products that are available to support a portfolio process. In addition to the cost of obtaining a license for such a system, commercial systems are generally limited in their ability to meet the specific needs of the institution and may not produce evidence of learning outcomes that could not be provided by a commercial norm-referenced national examination. Most commercially available systems, for example, only archive portfolio materials but do not provide any systematic way to evaluate them (i.e., no rubrics or evaluation tools are provided). There is also a need for a "technology owner" who is both strong in his or her understanding of the technology and also understands the process and politics of outcomes assessment. This is important to interface between the faculty and the developers/ maintainers of the software.

Assessment of Portfolios

It is necessary to have a clear plan on how artifacts are categorized and assessed in a meaningful, focused way that is relevant to the desired student outcomes. Because of the potential time commitment to evaluate portfolios for a number of outcomes, a clear plan needs to be developed on the nature of the rubrics to be used and the format for the scoring process. It is helpful to think ahead to what an assessment report might contain, including the results of portfolio assessment. If you are planning to use portfolios for program assessment, answers to the following questions can guide the development of the process.

Is everything in *every* student's portfolio going to be assessed? The answer to this question will determine the type of feedback process that is built into the system. If the program has a small number of students, it may be desirable to assess every portfolio. However, for a large program, it may not be practical or possible to assess every portfolio. If that is the case, consideration should be given to developing a mechanism to sample part of every student's portfolio. This would require a sampling technique to select a part of every student's portfolio over time. This method would ensure that every student would have at least part of their portfolio scored by faculty. This is a feature that can be built into an electronic portfolio design.

Are you going to assess *every* learning objective every year or semester? A plan needs to be developed that is both methodologically sound and requires a reasonable degree of effort. Sample portfolios for potential problem areas (i.e., which of the performance objectives appear to be the most problematic for students?) and develop an assessment schedule to maximize the ability to identify areas for improvement early in the process. All outcomes should be assessed with the same rigor, but the results of that assessment will differ. When evidence indicates that students are having difficulty demonstrating a desired learning objective at the appropriate level, improvements designed to promote the objective can be made in the processes and new assessments made. Learning objectives targeted for improvement can be assessed more frequently than the objectives that students consistently meet. An electronic portfolio system can automate the search and sampling process.

Linking Results to Practice

Having a well-designed portfolio is critical to both the efficiency and the effectiveness of measuring student outcomes for the purpose of improving the educational process. However, without a mechanism to link the assessment findings to curricular processes, it will be difficult to focus improvements in ways that provide improved outcomes. This reemphasizes the need to have well-defined student learning objectives and to use them to guide the design of classroom strategies. At the program or institutional level, this is very problematic as faculty do not sense the same kind of "ownership" of program or institutional learning objectives that they do of those in their courses. Mechanisms need to be found to keep the broader learning objectives in front of faculty and reinforce their importance. It is recommended that a curriculum map be developed that links course program objectives to those that are the focus of institutional or program assessment activity. An analysis of the curriculum map by major and learning objective can provide valuable information about the level to which the objectives are being introduced, reinforced, and built upon. It also provides a way to make meaning out of the analysis of the portfolios and directs where improvements can be made. Without this step in the process, the results will provide information but no mechanism to turn the information into recommendations for improvement.

Summary

Portfolios are being considered as the assessment tool of choice by many institutions struggling with how to provide evidence of student outcomes. Portfolios have been identified as a valuable tool for authentic, direct assessment. However, before making the decision to implement student portfolios for the purpose of assessing student learning, several decisions need to be made. The decision making process should be inclusive of the stakeholders who are affected by the process. An inclusive process that considers all the steps described above will make it possible to avoid common mistakes in designing and implementing a portfolio process.

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[1] Rogers, Gloria, and Jean Sando. 1996. *Stepping ahead: An assessment plan development guide.* Terre Haute, IN: Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology.

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Digital Portfolios: The Plan, the Assessment, a Preview

Terry Corwin
Val Christensen

We live in a technology-enhanced world. As a leader in instructional technology and teacher education in the state of North Dakota, Valley City State University (VCSU, http://www.vcsu.edu/) has implemented the innovation of digital portfolios to promote student/faculty technology use and train pre-service teachers for this world. The paper describes the diffusion of an innovation, digital multimedia portfolios on CD-ROM, into the teacher education program and the entire curriculum. During the completion of each student's degree requirements, the student compiles multimedia projects that demonstrate eight Abilities endorsed by the university. The projects are created within courses taken for completion of general education and the academic majors. Each project demonstrates content knowledge and one of the eight Abilities.

Introduction

The project, to apply ability-based assessment as a tool in the Valley City State University curricula and, as a result, enable students to complete a multimedia digital portfolio on CD-ROM prior to graduation, became visible on the campus in November 1995. The campus secured a five-year Title III grant from the federal government. It funded equipment, personnel, and support for faculty training. The grant enabled the CD-ROM portfolios process to become a campus-wide initiative. The portfolio is integrated into the curriculum through application of the university's eight Abilities and twenty-two Skills (See Table I). The Abilities and Skills had previously been created by the faculty and adopted by the faculty senate. A project is assigned in most every course offered. In almost every academic course, a project is assigned with rubrics from the selected skill level for the course.

Background

Valley City State University is a campus of about 1,100 students. Eighty percent of its students major in education or business. Two innovations on the campus made the CD-ROM portfolios a possibility. First, in the spring of 1995 a campus technology committee made the decision to create one of the nation's first notebook computer campuses. In the fall of 1996 every full-time student was issued an IBM Notebook computer upon registration. The notebooks allow students to create and save materials on their own hard drives. The faculty received their notebooks and appropriate training in February 1996 (Tykwinski, Brown, and Holleque 1997).

A second innovation allowed the faculty to choose the CD-ROM format for the portfolios. The campus network was developed to allow fairly simple movement of large files from computer to computer. This made saving materials and creating CD-ROMs feasible for a large number of students. These realities make the ambitiousness of the digital multimedia portfolio project more lucid. The illustration in Figure 1 demonstrates the campus integration process.

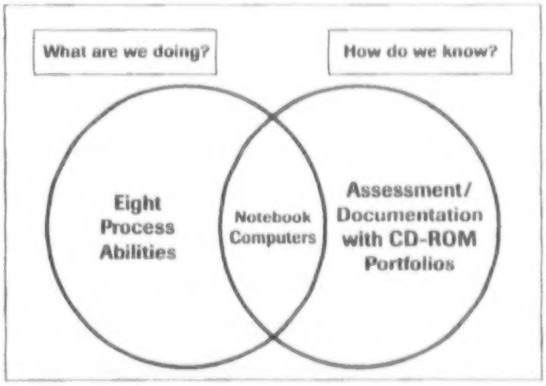

Figure 1. The Campus Integration Diagram

The Process

To begin the diffusion of the portfolio process, a ten-member faculty learning team representing every academic division was established. These individuals began discussing the portfolio process and making decisions about the purpose, audience, and expectations for the senior portfolio. Among the articles read and discussed by the team were Sheingold and Frederiksen (1995) and Gillespie, Ford, Gillespie, and Leavell, (1996). The members of the group also received training on the hardware and software needed to create multimedia projects. The second year of the implementation process included one-on-one mentoring for ten more faculty members. The process continued until, by the end of the fourth year, 85 percent of the faculty had been involved in the process. In the fifth year a priority was placed on mentoring new faculty. Also during the fourth year of the process, faculty stipends were provided for those who wished to generate Ability-based projects for their courses or produce program course maps that identified the connections between course and the Abilities and Skills.

Table 1: The Eight University Abilities and Twenty-two Skills

Abilities	Skills
1. Communications	Written
	Visual
	Spoken
	Performance
2. Collaboration	Positive Interdependence
	Leadership
3. Effective Citizenship	Provides Service to Others
	Teaches Others
	Change Agent Skills
4. Global Perspectives	Works with Diversity
	Understands System Interrelationships
5. Problem Solving	Gathering Information
	Problem Recognition
	Creative Thinking Decision Making
	Systems Analysis
	Decision Making
6. Technology	Selects
	Applies
7. Aesthetic Engagement	Receptivity
	Visualization
8. Wellness	Self-Management
	Self-Worth

Integration

During freshman orientation following the distribution of the notebook computers, a four-hour computer basics session is held. The senior portfolios are demonstrated at this time. Necessary hardware and software skills for multimedia development are included in a required general education course taken by 95 percent of freshmen. These course activities include Web page creation, scanning, CD burning, and audio and video capture. All other necessary expertise is integrated into existing courses and included in the curriculum content as needed for the projects.

Each division determines how and where their students begin to develop the portfolio and which of the Abilities are included in the senior portfolio. The projects are created with assessment rubrics that students must respond to when completing the project. Faculty in each academic program assess the senior portfolios prior to graduation. Education faculty assess the teacher education portion of the portfolio.

The division of education was the first to fully adopt the portfolio. The senior electronic portfolio is currently required for the exit exam in the teacher education program. A one-credit senior electronic portfolio seminar is offered in each division during every semester to aid students in the development of their portfolios. These classes review the accepted layout of the portfolio, the types of projects that can be used, and some of the technical skills required. The portfolio audience is also discussed in this seminar. In addition, a handbook for the senior electronic portfolio project that includes how-to steps and examples has been developed. A Web site is available to assist the students (http:/ /www.vcsu.nodak.edu/facultystaff-dev/portfolios.htm).

Beginning in 2002, each graduating senior will organize a digital portfolio and burn a CD-ROM for use by faculty in his or her major as an assessment device and/or by students as part of employment activities. Currently approximately fifty portfolios are submitted each year, and 80 percent of those are from teacher education students. The other 20 percent are from business and human resource graduates.

Problems and Issues

Over the past eight years, the faculty of Valley City State University have endeavored to modify general education objectives and to establish a more meaningful connection of general education coursework to the academic majors. The purpose of the change was to make the objectives more assessable and observable. To facilitate these changes, a campus-wide committee of faculty was formed. The committee identified a set of eight Abilities from the existing objective statements and added twenty-two Skills that could be demonstrated by the students. It was determined that students would demonstrate the eight Abilities and Skills using multimedia projects in both general education and major courses. A complete booklet on the Abilities is available at this Web site: <http://www.vcsu.nodak.edu/facultystaff-dev/portfolios.htm>. Projects created in the academic classroom are based on content knowledge and also demonstrate the student's level of competency in a given ability and skill.

During the spring of 2000, faculty members at VCSU developed rubrics to establish five levels for each of the twenty-two Skills. Levels one, two, and three occur in general education courses, and the upper levels are developed in the academic majors.

At the end of each semester, a day is reserved for graduating seniors to present their portfolios to a small group of faculty members. The faculty members then accept or reject the finished electronic portfolios. This process is still evolving, with much evaluation and feedback instigating new change.

Documenting and assessing the Abilities became a topic of discussion on the campus. The multimedia portfolio assessment process was seen as a practical tool that would allow students to demonstrate competence levels in the Abilities and Skills.

Assessment and Tracking Student Progress

A Web-based tracking system is currently being considered. The Web site will be connected to a database that allows students to submit their work in each of the Abilities and Skills. A checklist of completions is then available to the students and others. Student progress will tracked at checkpoints by advisors and through the completion of class projects.

A campus task force is currently studying the parameters needed for the tracking system The plan for the tracking system is expected to be turned over to a vender by the summer of 2002. Implementation of a beta system is expected in the spring semester of 2003. The system will make it possible to access student projects for assessment purposes. This process is explained in the VCSU assessment plan, "Assessment of Student Learning."

Existing Outcomes

Students are increasingly perceived and treated as full partners in the learning process and institutional governance. A strong emphasis on what students must know and be able to do is surmounting traditional orientation toward courses and credit hours as the measures of learning achievement.

Faculty are diversifying with innovative teaching strategies. For example, a 1994 survey showed that a minimum of half the faculty used behavior modification, futuristic forecasting, independent study, field trips, role-playing, and student journals. Percentages below indicate changes in the use of technology for teaching and learning.

Daily faculty use of computers for instruction is more than double the national average rate (Green 1996). Nearly all faculty members are integrating technology-based instruction into their courses. A new multimedia classroom is used several hours each day.

Institutionalizing the activities involved in this project, in a very real sense, requires the entire university budget. Only by directing all time and money toward becoming an innovative, technology-based, student-centered institution will we complete the transformation process. The CD-ROM is one piece of this process.

The trend in the use of multimedia (with audio or video) has increased steadily over the five-year period between 1996 and 2000. Faculty use of multimedia increased from 24 percent to 66 percent while student use for academic purposes increased from 18 percent to 46 percent over the same period (Corwin 2000).

Beginning in 2001 all faculty applying for promotion or tenure will be required to organize and submit their material in a digital format.

1. Other university outcomes reported from data gathered over a five-year period by Dr. Terry Corwin include the following:

    - 94 percent of faculty indicate they participated in technology training activities during the 1999–2000 school year
    - 94 percent of faculty indicate they had portfolio projects integrated into their course requirements
    - 80 percent of faculty report that their computer is essential to their teaching (Marcinkiewicz and Welliver 1993)
    - 69 percent of the faculty report that they require students to use five or more types of technology as part of their course requirements
    - 82 percent of the faculty report using five or more types of technology in preparation for their teaching or as part of the in class activities (Corwin 2000)

    More complete data and statistical information are available on the Web at http://www.vcsu.nodak.edu/facultystaff-dev/research/Techuse96-00.htm.

2. A student survey adminstered for the fourth year in 2000 reports the in-depth opinions of our students concerning their learning and the use of technology as part of that learning. The survey was created and correlated in by Dr. Kathryn Holleque (1998), Division of Education and Psychology. Highlights are listed below, and complete results may be found at: http://community.vcsu.edu/facultypages/kathryn_holleque/Surveys.htm.

    - Using a computer increases my communication with other students: 93 percent
    - Having my own computer broadens ways for me to receive and/or present information: 97 percent
    - Having my own computer saves me time: 95 percent
    - It is important to me to have computer access at any time, day or night: 90 percent
    - Using various technologies enhances my learning experience: 90 percent
    - I use my computer daily: 90 percent
    - Using a computer provides a variety of settings for learning (e.g., working by myself, working with others, working as a member of a team): 90 percent

Future Outcomes of the Portfolio Process

VCSU students will become self-directed, self-assessing learners. The use of portfolios in general classes and the completion of a CD-ROM portfolio gives students more ownership in their own assessment. The student-centered tracking software for storage of projects will make students responsible for their learning materials.

VCSU will increase the appropriate use of instructional technologies, including notebook computing for improving teaching and learning. The student notebook computer initiative is central to creating and saving portfolio materials.

VCSU will produce graduates who demonstrate that they meet established standards of knowledge and abilities. The demonstration of the eight Abilities through the CD-ROM portfolio provides the vehicle. VCSU will streamline and reduce duplication of courses by focusing on the unique contributions of each course and its competencies for graduation.

The ultimate aim of the CD-ROM portfolio project is to complete a major transformation of institutional culture and practice that began with a mandate from the State Board of Higher Education in 1990, from a traditional teaching institution to a student-centered, innovating, technology-based institution.

Conclusions

Technology use has increased significantly among the faculty. Over nearly the same time period, 1996–1999, the reports (Green 1996, 1999) indicate that the percentage of institutions using technology in instruction has increased from:

- 24 percent to 54 percent in the use of e-mail
- 15 percent to 38 percent in Internet use
- 8 percent to 28 percent in the use of Web pages

Over this same period, VCSU faculty reported the following increase from:

- 28 percent to 98 percent in the use of e-mail
- 57 percent to 97 percent in Internet use
- 30 percent to 77 percent in the use of Web pages

VCSU has become a technology rich teaching and learning environment. Students indicate there has been a significant rise in several practices that indicate good practices in teaching.

When surveyed on their satisfaction with the eight Ability areas, employers indicate that their satisfaction with VCSU graduates has continued to increase for the past five years (Corwin 2000).

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Student Portfolios: A Direct Measure of Academic Achievement at a Two-Year College of Business

Patti Ziegler

Background

AIB College of Business is a two-year business college located in Des Moines, Iowa. The college was first accredited by NCA in 1986. An Institutional Plan for Assessing Student Academic Achievement was written and approved by NCA in September 1994. This plan included a structure for assessing student academic achievement and a matrix of institutional plan for assessment of student academic achievement. Both of these documents included numerous indirect and direct measures of assessment. From 1994 to 1999, the college implemented many of these measures.

In April 1999, the college was evaluated by a team of Commission Consultant-Evaluators for continued accreditation. This followed an intense year of in-depth self-study by the institution. All constituents were involved in the self-study process; nearly all individuals felt it was a very good and worthwhile process.

A key element in the self-study process was assessment of student academic achievement. A Summary Report on the Institutional Plan for Assessing Student Academic Achievement was attached to the AIB Self-Study Report. The summary report reflected the following for each major area of study at the college:

- Competencies established for each major
- A grid depicting where the competencies were being met (course by course)
- A list of assessment activities, various measures of assessment, specific results, and changes implemented

The report of the site visit team included a commendation for the college's proactive commitment to assessment of student academic achievement. The team also recommended that the college continue to pursue assessment in an aggressive manner and required the college to submit a progress report within two years. Specific comments from the team included the following:

> Although the institution has made progress in designing its plan for assessment of student academic achievement, there are few multiple measures of student success, and the plan is not designed to bring about program improvements. The team recommends that a progress report be provided on the assessment plan by July 1, 2001.

Following several discussions with the NCA liaison, Dr. John Taylor, the college embarked on a project to implement student portfolios as a direct measure of academic achievement. This process evolved over a three-year period of time. Phase One included exploration by a portfolio committee and a pilot project in a select class. Phase Two included definition of competencies used as direct measures of academic achievement within programs of study. Phase Three was the clarification of requirements for the portfolio, which included specific artifacts and logistical details. Phase Four was the implementation stage. This report will provide details of each phase of the project, along with a summary conclusion.

Phase One: Exploration

In 1998, a portfolio committee was formed to conduct research on student portfolios and to provide recommendations to the college in this regard. A member of the assessment committee chaired the committee. Faculty members were selected from each academic department. Organization of the committee was not a smooth process, with various agendas surfacing. Within a year, the committee scaled back to four regular members who believed in the portfolio concept and who were willing to implement the project in select classes. In the summer 1999, an office administration faculty member, who was a member of the portfolio committee, implemented portfolios as a pilot program in a capstone class, Administrative Assistant Applications. Two faculty members from the portfolio committee (and outside of the office administration department), along with the academic dean, evaluated the portfolios, using a rubric. Grading of the portfolios proved to be quite consistent, even with three different perspectives. (A sample of the rubric will be available at the workshop.)

One faculty member on the portfolio committee was also the lead instructor for the Psychology of Success class at the college. This class is a required class for most first-year students. It seemed to be a logical starting point for portfolio implementation. In March 2000, students began compiling their portfolios in this class.

Phase Two: Definition

Information on the portfolio project was presented to the assessment committee in November 1999. The information was again presented at a full faculty meeting in January 2000. Many questions and concerns were voiced at each of the meetings regarding the purpose of the portfolio, grading, and logistical issues. In May 2000, the summary report was again reviewed at a full faculty meeting. Objectives, competencies, and direct measures of student academic achievement were reviewed. During the summer of 2000, faculty were updating competencies for their courses and for their programs of study, listing specific direct measures for the competencies throughout the process.

During this time, general education faculty members were discussing direct measures of academic achievement within their classes. Other academic departments were also to be defining competencies within their programs of study. This is one area where a bottleneck occurred that slowed the process. Faculty truly were either not understanding the expectations or were not buying into the concept—probably a little of both was occurring.

By winter 2000-2001, academic departmental team leaders were required to identify five to eight competencies for each of their programs of study, along with direct measures of assessment and identification of the classes where the competencies were to be measured. At a spring 2001 faculty meeting, it was clear that faculty still were not responding to these components of the portfolio.

Phase Three: Clarification

In May 2001, the academic dean led a full faculty discussion regarding portfolios, once again reiterating the need for general education competencies and five to eight competencies for each program of study. Discussions and a general question/answer period helped to clarify many of the questions and to examine the logistics of implementing the portfolios. Other concerns included the real purpose for the portfolios, grading of the artifacts, and ensuring the integrity of the portfolios.

More faculty members began to "own" the process. One faculty member coined the phrase "The Three-Legged Stool" concept for our portfolios:

- Psychology of success component
- General education component
- Major/supporting competencies component

Specific competencies were established for each of the three components. In addition, specific artifacts were defined, representing a direct measure of achievement. Capstone classes were identified in each major for submitting and final grading of the portfolio. Checklists were developed for each major to ease the burden of tracking and correcting, for both students and the faculty.

Phase Four: Implementation

The college made an important commitment at this stage. A long-term, well-respected faculty member was appointed as quarter-time assessment coordinator. In that capacity, she assisted the academic dean and the academic team leaders in the necessary follow-up. A large amount of administrative support was needed at this time for the development of the checklists and sample portfolios, etc.

An all-school assembly was held in July 2001 to inform students of the purpose and the process for portfolio implementation at the college. Student checklists were prepared ahead of time by faculty members, reflecting coursework already completed. This required that faculty be trained and oriented regarding curriculum and the college transcripts of grades.

Full implementation of portfolios began with current day school students in summer 2001. Night school faculty and students were brought into the process in fall 2001. Transfer students and re-entry students were also oriented to the process in fall 2001.

Some students were skeptical about the process at the beginning. Questions arose regarding responsibility for the portfolio and grading of the portfolio in the capstone classes. Gradually, however, students began to see the value of documenting artifacts of their learning during their two years at the college. They began to appreciate their accomplishments and were proud to share their portfolios with prospective employers. The admissions department asked for copies of portfolios to be used in the recruiting process.

Conclusion

There have been many side benefits to implementation of portfolios at our college. Faculty members have had opportunities to reflect on the interrelatedness of the curriculum. Students have been able to document direct measures of their learning at the college. Prospective employers, too, are able to see what students can actually "do" rather than just hear an explanation of what students "know."

However, our challenges are not over. It is important, now, for faculty members to continue to assess student learning so that program improvement occurs. As we review portfolios, we must continue to ask whether we are satisfied that students are learning what we are teaching. Do these direct measures indicate a level of competence that meets our expectations? If so, how do we continue to build on those competencies? If not, how do we adjust the curriculum to ensure that level of competence?

As mentioned earlier, one of the greatest benefits for the college has been the involvement of the faculty members in the curriculum. We are well on our way to addressing the questions mentioned above and moving toward a higher level of assessment. We anticipate continued program improvement as the result of implementing student portfolios as a direct measure of academic achievement.

Note

The following items will be available at the break-out session:

- Assessment summary report, which was included with the self-study, listing competencies for each major; a grid depicting where the competencies are being met; and a list of assessment activities, various measures of assessment, specific results, and changes implemented
- Sample rubric used in the pilot portfolio project
- Sample portfolio checklists (including transcript for updating)
- Sample portfolio

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Five Course and Program Assessment Tools for Your Assessment Toolbox

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> *Any educational assessment project is incomplete unless it includes data on student reports, student outcomes, and the educational environment to which the student is exposed.*
>
> Alexander Astin (1993)

In May 1999 the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) visited the Air Force Academy. In the verbal out-brief to the Academy's superintendent (president equivalent), the accreditation team commented that the Academy's assessment effort was "marvelous." By employing multiple assessment techniques, the Academy is able to identify patterns of convergence in data as a basis for programmatic changes. The purpose of this paper is to highlight a few of the many tools used by the Academy to accomplish ongoing assessment of the academic program at both the course and departmental levels. The tools presented have broad applicability in a variety of settings.

The five unique program assessment tools were identified by reviewing the Academy's assessment catalog. The catalog provides an "at a glance" summary of assessment efforts related to cadet academic achievement, performance of Academy graduates in the Air Force, and performance of the departments and agencies in their educational mission. First created in 1997, the catalog was a product of an administrative initiative to document assessment efforts already in place. The USAFA assessment catalog serves several purposes. It allows for cross-flow of assessment ideas between and among departments and agencies; identifies internal and external sources of assessment data; allows for easy identification of qualitative and quantitative assessment methods; categorizes assessment instrument types; tracks the currency and frequency of use of assessment methods; identifies decisions based on assessment data; links the assessments to the Academy's educational outcomes; provides judgments about the utility of the assessment methods (low, moderate, high); and identifies knowledgeable points of contact within departments and agencies. The tools presented in this paper were carefully selected from the catalog to allow for easy modification for use in a variety of settings.

According to Palomba and Banta, "a key to assessment success is involving faculty in the process" (1999, 10). The views and voices of faculty members need to be considered when framing questions and identifying topics of inquiry. In many instances, faculty are responsible for designing and implementing an assessment plan, as well as reporting results and making recommendations for programmatic changes (Schilling and Schilling 1998). Students are also key players in the implementation of a successful assessment plan. The tools offered grew from a "bottom up" implementation at the Academy. Each academic department designs tools to meet its specific assessment needs. Stakeholder involvement is high, and students are key players in many of the assessments.

The tools selected for discussion in this paper include:

- A new perspective on surveys
- Knowledge probes
- Commercial exams
- Capstone projects
- Quick course diagnosis

Every assessment tool comes with its own strengths, weaknesses, strategies, guidelines, data analysis techniques, and potential uses. The assessment tools listed above have broad application potential at the course and program level in a range of institutional venues. A discussion of these issues for each of the five program assessment tools follows. The handouts for the session include some of the actual assessment instruments and sample assessment reports.

☐ **A New Perspective on Surveys**

- ◇ *Purpose:* To collect data on student opinions, perceptions, and attitudes
- ◇ *Strengths:*
  - ○ Students feel that they have a voice
  - ○ Easy to administer
  - ○ Popular
- ◇ *Weaknesses:*
  - ○ Overuse
  - ○ Low response rates and voluntary samples
  - ○ Design principles often ignored
  - ○ Can be difficult to analyze
- ◇ *Strategies and guidelines:* Select topics and word questions carefully to avoid ambiguity. Think about how the results will be analyzed and presented as the questions are formulated. Minimize the total number of questions and ask only what you really need to know. Conduct a pilot study. Do all you can to maximize your response rate. Follow-up with non-respondents. Analyze data and present results in a clear, concise format.
- ◇ *Data analysis techniques:* Think about how you will do the analysis and reporting while the survey is being designed. Experiment with different graphical methods. Combine the results of related items on one graph or chart. Be careful when splitting groups for comparison purposes. When presenting anecdotal data, be sure to select examples from the entire range of responses. Archive data and copies of reports. Consider longitudinal analysis and reporting.

☐ **Knowledge Probes**

- ◇ *Purpose:*
  - ○ To obtain both pre and post data on conceptual knowledge and skills
  - ○ To measure changes in conceptual knowledge and skills
  - ○ To include student self-assessment in the assessment mix
- ◇ *Strengths:*
  - ○ Provides the students with a snapshot of the course topics
  - ○ Increases students' awareness of their own conceptual knowledge and skills
  - ○ Helps the instructor plan the course, including review topics
  - ○ Serves as a diagnostic assessment for the instructor and students
  - ○ Is an indicator of overlooked or poorly covered material
  - ○ Can serve as a final exam wake-up call
  - ○ Can serve as a template for a final exam
  - ○ Is less time-consuming than an actual exam
- ◇ *Weaknesses:*
  - ○ Not a direct measure of conceptual knowledge or skills
  - ○ Requires comprehensive course goals and objectives
  - ○ Students may not be mature enough to self-assess
- ◇ *Strategies and guidelines:* Prepare comprehensive course objectives and a series of questions to probe students on their perception of their knowledge or skill in the topical areas (use the scale: no knowledge, partial knowledge, and full knowledge). Administer the knowledge probe on the first course meeting.

Analyze resultant data. Repeat the probe at the end of the semester. Analyze resultant data and compare data with early results.

- *Data analysis techniques:* Prepare bar graphs for pre and post probe results. Compare data with results from direct measures such as mid-term and final exams.

☐ **Commercial Exams**

- *Purpose:*
  - To obtain a direct measure of student knowledge and skills
  - To benchmark against other institutions
  - To benchmark against local assessment instruments
- *Strengths:*
  - Exams are written by professionals and include documentation of validity and reliability
  - Exams are scored professionally
  - Exams provide the ability to baseline and benchmark
- *Weaknesses:*
  - Exams may not match local educational objectives
  - Students may not be motivated to do well on exams, and incentives may be required
  - It may be difficult to schedule time for students to take exams
  - Exams are expensive, especially the scoring of open-ended items
  - Choosing the best exam may be time-consuming
  - Results may be difficult to interpret
- *Strategies and guidelines:* Determine the purpose of the exam at the institutional and program level. Explore the variety of choices by first reading the commercial literature. Rank order choices and review actual exams. Consider sample size (or census), logistics, and incentives. Strive for administrator, faculty, and student buy-in.
- *Data analysis techniques:* Combine local analysis with commercial reports to answer the questions proposed when the exam was selected. Provide summary reports to all stakeholders, including students.

☐ **Capstone Projects**

- *Purpose:*
  - To engage students in courses at the conclusion of their programs of study and require the integration of concepts and practical applications
  - To allow students to demonstrate their ability to practically apply what they have learned during their course of study
- *Strengths:*
  - Courses may act as a gatekeeper for students who master the knowledge aspect of their coursework but who cannot apply what they have learned
  - Projects generated during capstone courses may be used to demonstrate expertise when the student is ready to seek employment or enter graduate school
  - Capstone courses may allow an opportunity for students to interact with professionals in a field environment
  - Capstone courses afford the student an opportunity to integrate concepts presented over a range of courses
- *Weaknesses:*
  - Capstone courses may be viewed as taking credit hours away from additional courses or course content
  - Faculty who have narrow fields of expertise may prefer not to teach capstone courses
  - Capstone projects may be difficult to assess

- ◇ *Strategies and guidelines:* Involve all faculty in the development of capstone courses to achieve broad buy-in. Use alternative assessment techniques in capstone courses to determine the extent of student integration and application of central concepts across program curricula. Alternative assessment techniques may include journaling, model building, community projects, and the like (Jones and Houghtalen 2000). Involve professional experts if appropriate.
- ◇ *Data analysis techniques:* Develop rubrics to evaluate capstone projects. Consider relevance, practicality, and utility. Invite experts in the field to develop criteria and perform evaluations.

☐ **Quick Course Diagnosis**

- ◇ *Purpose:*
  - ○ To involve students in the course in program assessment through an interactive medium
- ◇ *Strengths:*
  - ○ Feedback is deeper and richer than that obtained using traditional surveys and can provide insights that might not occur without interaction between students
  - ○ Students feel that they have a voice
  - ○ Less time-consuming than focus groups
  - ○ Method is more efficient than individual interviews
  - ○ Requires minimal planning
- ◇ *Weaknesses:*
  - ○ Requires twenty to twenty-five minutes of class time
  - ○ Requires mature, responsible student participation
  - ○ Requires skill on the part of the facilitator
  - ○ Shy or minority students may be reluctant to participate
  - ○ Students may suggest unreasonable changes to the course or program
- ◇ *Strategies and guidelines:* A non-biased facilitator visits the class and leads the students in two exercises. Follow the protocol developed at the Air Force Academy.
- ◇ *Data analysis techniques:* Qualitative analysis of the identified strengths and weaknesses to include the identification of trends. Quantitative analysis of student satisfaction data and counting of trend data. Can be correlated with student ratings data.

Essential to any comprehensive assessment program is the triangulation of data and its subsequent use in curricular decisions (Donald and Denison 2001). By employing multiple assessment techniques and collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, assessors are able to identify patterns of convergence in data as a basis for programmatic changes. The assessment methods presented in this paper actively involve faculty and students and can be tailored to specific course and program goals and objectives. The tools can be used to answer locally generated questions, meet program assessment and accreditation requirements, and aid the curricular decision-making process.

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A Technological Infrastructure for Collecting, Managing, and Interpreting Assessment Data: The Winona Assessment Project

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Most colleges and universities are actively engaged in attempts to create cultures of assessment on their campuses. Armed with The Higher Learning Commission's "Levels of Assessment" document or the AQIP portfolio criteria, administrators, self-study coordinators and even some faculty throughout the North Central region of the United States are trying to figure out what it means to really "do" assessment.

Winona State University (WSU) has adopted a culture-building approach to assessment. WSU was aware that building a culture would be an evolutionary and time-consuming process, but the result would be one that would create a long lasting commitment to assessment. Cultures cannot be consciously created but instead emerge through the interaction and experiences of individuals with their colleagues and the environment; are shared through symbols, stories, rituals, and oral histories; and are regulated by rules and policies. Unlike the climate of an institution, which is characterized by "seasons," cultures endure.

Winona State's early efforts to create a culture of assessment were through education and incentives. Educating faculty and staff created a common language from which to discuss and debate assessment. Financial incentives were given to the departments and programs that volunteered to be early adopters. While both of these efforts moved the assessment initiative forward, the impact was ameliorated by the limitations created by a counterproductive technological structure that could not answer the sophisticated questions that were beginning to be asked by increasingly assessment-astute faculty and staff.

As is the case with most colleges and universities across the country, Winona State's assessment activities were severely limited by the inability to efficiently and effectively store and access data. Data were stored in collection silos, with a separate silo for each type of data (student survey data, financial aid data, admission data, student records, etc.). These silos were located in different offices throughout the campus (Admissions, Registrar's Office, Housing Office, Academic Affairs) and had no interconnectivity as each database came online at different times and without universal data collection standards. Compounding the problem was that in many cases data dictionaries were nonexistent and data definitions resided only in the minds of those few who had actually entered the data. The result was that much of the existing data was uninterpretable (except by a few individuals who knew what the data elements represented) and could not be linked together. The ability to explore relationships was, for all practical purposes, impossible.

Clearly, in order to embrace our assessment future, a technological infrastructure was required. The rationale was multifold. First, creating a structure—as opposed to a procedure—would be more likely to have a long lasting impact on campus and really move us toward the creation of a culture of assessment. We knew that we could quickly and easily design assessment procedures that might be impressive to a site visit team that was not very astute in assessment, but procedures alone would not have the cultural impact of a structure for data collection and analysis. Secondly, a solid technological infrastructure would move some assessment activities away from the department to the university level, allowing departments to focus on student learning issues. Issues such as study habits, student satisfaction, and many indirect measures of student learning can be easily measured on the university level, freeing the departments to focus their energies on direct measures of student learning. Third, a smartly designed technological infrastructure would position us well to respond to relevant questions for either a traditional reaccreditation self-study or, should we choose, an AQIP portfolio. Finally, the creation of a robust technological infrastructure would allow faculty and staff to "see" assessment in action, and thus (the reasoning went) would create a sense of interest (and perhaps even enthusiasm) for assessment. Until this point, all requests for data were filtered through the Office of Institutional Research, with a turn around time of between two days and two weeks. Faculty and staff were seldom aware of the data collected, and never had the opportunity to explore the data on their own.

So we knew what we wanted, we just needed to figure out how to get it.

The process of creating a new technological infrastructure began in 1999 with the writing and receipt of a five-year, $1.36 million Title III U.S. Department of Education grant. Upon receipt of the grant, the first step in the project was to identify the relevant assessment-related data elements from the existing databases on campus (admissions, financial aid, student records, and placement) and download them into a separate read-only database administered by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research. We were selective about what data elements we brought into the database. While all data are interesting, not all data have utility for assessment analysis. A dedicated server was established along with a download schedule from the university database (which pulled directly from the system-wide student records system) and the other rogue databases on campus.

In addition to the existing data, electronic student survey modules were created that allowed for the addition of self-report and observational data into the database. Student modules measure student satisfaction, needs, study habits, and perceptions of the quality and availability of services, learning growth, instruction, and campus climate. When students log into the assessment World Wide Web site in a secure mode, they are identified by the database and receive a survey created of individual modules (question sets) selected specifically for that student based upon the number of credits they have earned and their major. Modules contain between two and forty questions, and are programmed into the system so that students are answering specific questions at appropriate times in their college careers. As a result, second semester sophomores are asked questions about their general education classes and on-campus student life, while upper division students are asked about courses in their major and preparation for careers. Modules are mixed and matched to create surveys, with the same module scheduled for completion two or three times during a student's college career. This allows for measuring both cohort and individual development. All surveys are designed to take no more than fifteen minutes to complete and are available twenty-four hours a day for the two weeks following our Assessment Day. Though participation in the Web-based surveys is not required by the university, individual departments throughout campus do require their students to complete the surveys. In the past four years, participation has grown incrementally to a current rate of 40 percent.

In addition to the university designed surveys, individual departments and programs have designed modules for specific groups of students. For instance, the Summer School Office created a module to learn how to better meet the scheduling needs of students planning on attending classes in the summer. The Nursing Department has an extensive module they require of their students, while the Education Department has created a module to gauge their graduating students' understanding of the current graduation standards. All of these modules are programmed into the system so that only students identified as the target population receive them when they log into the system. All data are stored in tables and are connected to other data in the database through the students' identification numbers.

Learning outcome data are also entered into the system. In addition to CAAP data, student learning outcome data collected by individual academic departments and programs are also included in the database. Departmental outcome measures, as long as they are tied to a student identification number, can be connected with any other data in the database. WSU's Guidelines for Assessment very clearly state that departments OWN their assessment data. As such, the Office of Institutional Research does not collect departmental outcome data in order to eliminate any suspicion that assessment data are being used in faculty evaluation, tenure, and promotion decisions. Departments are therefore responsible for keeping their own data definitions and data dictionary. In other words, while data might be available for analysis, only those in the department know what the data actually represent.

The technological infrastructure that we have created can be used as both an information and an assessment tool. By creating a software program that essentially "blankets" the database, complex queries can be easily accessed by those with security clearance using intuitive analytical tools.

As an information tool, the technological infrastructure that has been developed has provided an invaluable resource to faculty and staff. The ad hoc query tool allows for real-time secure access to student records and data, which currently can be obtained (though it may take several days) through the Registrar's Office or the Office of Institutional Research. Using their identification and pin numbers, faculty are able to access data on students in their classes and majors. Faculty have found access to this kind of course information especially useful during the early weeks of the semester in order to obtain course lists and information about the students in their classes (local addresses, e-mail addresses, etc.), to monitor the progress of their advisees, and during pre-registration advising. As an information tool, ad hoc queries are limited to data already in a campus database, though the infrastructure allows for the connection of data across databases. As a result, an English professor teaching a first-year student composition course can find out the names of the students in the 8 A.M. section, along with the number of English courses the student completed in high school, the student's English ACT score and sub scores, and performance on the English placement exam—all on the same printout. Student self-report data (the student survey modules) are NOT accessible using the ad hoc query tool.

The reporting tool allows for access to student self-report behavioral and observational data as reported using the electronic student survey modules. Unlike the ad hoc query tool, which reports line item data, the reporting tool reports only aggregate data for the user specified population, as long as the population selected contains at least five students (to prevent the identification of individual students). Using the reporting tool, the user can identify specific population characteristics (for instance, a specific class and section or students within a particular GPA range), as well as the characteristics within which the user wants to compare (for instance, gender, year in school, or number of transfer credits). Following the identification of the population characteristics, the user can identify which self-report modules—our outcome modules—they want to examine. For example, it is possible to examine whether students with a certain pattern of high school preparation perform better on the CAAP test, or whether student study habits seem to impact student learning.

Future applications of the infrastructure involve developing classroom assessment modules, course and instructor evaluation modules, notification services, and interactive feedback. Two types of notification are envisioned: information level and intervention level. Information level notifications involve database generated e-mail messages sent to faculty when (for instance) a student declares a major in their department, when their course is filled during pre-registration, or when a potential major with a specific GPA, class rank, or ACT score lists their major as a potential field of study. Intervention level notifications occur when an advisee is identified as fitting the "risk profile" that has been developed and tested (for instance, when a student drops two or more classes during a semester). Interactive modules are also envisioned for the database. Following the completion of certain survey modules, students will be given the opportunity to immediately see how their responses compare to their peers, along with commentary based upon the results.

While the Commission site team that visited our campus in September 2001 was notably "underwhelmed" with the technological infrastructure we have built, the database and software have put us well on our way to creating a culture of assessment. Admittedly, starting from a cultur e that did not value data at all (because it was hard to obtain), and knowing that any social movement takes years to become acculturated, the energy invested in creating this structure for assessment—as opposed to concentrating on getting departments to generate one student learning datapoint to appease the site team—has been well spent. Our carefully considered, phased roll out plan started with one application (the student list) and a specific population of users (departmental secretaries). The feedback from this group has shaped further development of the project. At present, most of the departmental support staff and about half of the faculty have been trained in the use of the information tools (student list and query tool). Several departments are currently testing the reporting tool and expect to train the remaining faculty and staff during the August 2002 faculty development days. Quantitative student learning outcome data from departments are starting to be added into the database and will be available for analysis using the reporting tool.

By allowing faculty to access data using carefully designed intuitive analytical tools, assessment has become an immediate and (literally) hands-on experience, instead of an isolated, periodic exercise in response to an external exigency. The technological infrastructure we designed has allowed us to embrace the future though ongoing, systematic data collection, and the ability to access student assessment data in real time and promote campus-wide data based decision making. With the infrastructure and analytical tools in place, we will be able to obtain answers to complex questions that will positively impact both student life and learning at Winona State University.

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Delineating Shared Learning Outcomes and Standards for Their Assessment

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At the inception of its assessment program in 1995, Bowling Green State University made a decision to adopt a decentralized strategy for assessing student achievement. That decision has had a number of enduring impacts on assessment, some of which were anticipated and others of which were not. We expected that by asking each department to develop learning outcomes and an assessment plan for the undergraduate major, we would increase faculty ownership of assessment. By beginning with learning outcomes specific to each major, we believed we could ask faculty to develop an approach to assessment that made a tangible contribution to teaching and learning in that program, and avoid faculty distrust of programs designed to satisfy externally imposed demands for accountability. We also expected that a decentralized approach would yield better alignment of learning outcomes with curriculum and pedagogy. In contrast, we did not anticipate that the decentralized approach would yield a clearer understanding of the common goals of the many majors and provide pathways for increasing the coherence of the total undergraduate experience.

After each program had described learning outcomes for students in its major, we undertook a content analysis of those 355 outcomes. Setting aside the 13 percent of learning outcomes describing discipline-specific content, the 310 other learning outcomes could be gathered into a small number of groups of broad-based skills and abilities. For instance, almost without exception, each major valued writing in some form, such as business writing, scientific writing, creative writing, et cetera. Early in our efforts to understand and represent these common outcomes among the majors, we made an effort to describe them in the most inclusive terms. Continuing with the example of writing, we identified a common outcome of "literacies," which was to include learning outcomes having to do not just with the written and spoken word, but also with other symbol systems such as music and mathematics. As our understanding of the learning outcomes evolved, however, we focused on language-based literacy.

The complete set of six learning outcomes are now identified as university learning outcomes. They are presented as three pairs of related skills, using active verbs. Following are the description of these outcomes as they appear in the undergraduate catalog:

- ◊ BGSU graduates are critical and constructive thinkers, as shown by proficiency in investigating and in making connections.
    - ○ To Investigate (Latin, *investigatus*, from *in-* + *vestigium*, footprint, track): to observe or study by close examination and systematic inquiry. "Investigate" calls attention to systematic processes of exploring issues, collecting and analyzing evidence, and making informed judgments.
    - ○ To Connect (Middle English, from Latin *conectere*, from *com-* + *nectere*, to bind): to place or establish in relationship. "Connecting" is the essence of creative problem solving, shown in synthesizing knowledge within and across courses, integrating theory and practice, linking academic and life experiences, and relating one's self and culture to diverse cultures within the U.S. and globally.
- ◊ BGSU graduates communicate effectively, as shown by proficiency in writing and in making presentations.
    - ○ To Write (Middle English, from Old English *writan*, to scratch, draw, inscribe): to be the author, to compose. "Writing" requires fluency not only in English or another language, but often also in other symbol systems, such as logical, mathematical, visual, spatial, musical, or electronic.
    - ○ To Present (Middle English, from Latin *praesentare*, to be before): to make a presentation. "Present" is the oral counterpart of "write," requiring the same fluencies, and in addition fluency with bodily-kinesthetic symbols.

- ◇ Through personal character and values, BGSU graduates demonstrate effective social interaction, as shown by proficiency in participating and leading.
    - ○ To Participate (Latin, *participare*, to take): to have a part of share in something. "Participating" is a matter of active engagement, rather than passive observation, and is shown through working effectively in diverse groups and teams, as well as through cooperation and respect for others.
    - ○ To Lead (Middle English, *leden*, from Old English, *laeden*, to go): to guide or influence a group to achieve goals. "Leading" does not require formal authority or power, but rather is a matter of influence, integrity, spirit, and respect.

Because of the decentralized approach to assessment, and because the process of identifying the university learning outcomes proceeded from the specific outcomes in each of the majors to the general or common features shared among majors, the learning outcomes of each major are *necessarily* connected to the university learning outcomes. Each major does not emphasize all six. And the learning outcomes of the many different majors relate to different subsets of the university learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the university learning outcomes constitute a meaningful description of the academic goals held in common by our academic majors.

Furthermore, once the university learning outcomes were identified and named, we recognized that they overlapped broadly with the goals of the general education program. The general education program identifies a cognitive skill of "communication," which is clearly and directly related to the university learning outcomes "write" and "present." Similarly, the general education skill "analysis" has much in common with the university learning outcome "investigate," and the description of the general education skill of "integration" is virtually identical with the description of the university learning outcome "connect." We continue to work with the General Education Committee to agree upon names and descriptions of the common outcomes that reveal the full extent of the shared purposes of the general education program and the courses of study in the majors. At this level, the university learning outcomes represent coherence in the educational experience of the undergraduate that characterizes the overall course of study. The university learning outcomes identify the skills and abilities that lie at the foundation of the general education program and manifest themselves in a variety of specialized and discipline-specific forms in the majors.

Even if the university learning outcomes only described the common educational goals of our various academic programs, they would have value. However, we want the university learning outcomes to contribute more directly to shaping undergraduates' educational experiences. Toward that end, we built on an approach used successfully in our general studies writing program. That program has a well-developed rubric used to evaluate and give feedback on levels of writing ability. We reasoned that the rubric, both because it is familiar to students and because it is so carefully developed, would be of value in upper level courses in the major where writing contributed significantly. Students would benefit from having a consistent framework across many courses by which they and their faculty could establish expectations for and evaluate performance in writing. Believing this approach would have greatest impact if it were applied to all the common skills and abilities, we developed six rubrics, one for each of the six university learning outcomes. These describe a developmental sequence of ability or performance in each of the learning outcomes: beginning, novice, proficient, and advanced.

The rubrics have been distributed to faculty in a variety of venues and are available on a university Web page (<http://folios/assessment/Rubrics.htm>). We have suggested that faculty adapt and customize these rubrics to particular applications, course assignments, or other activities. Our expectation and hope is that when distributed together with an assignment, a rubric will help students clarify the standards and expectations surrounding evaluation of the quality of the student's work. Furthermore, if such rubrics based on our prototypes were to become widely used, students would experience a consistent system of faculty expectation for learning across the curriculum.

It will probably be no surprise to learn that faculty enthusiasm for the university learning outcomes and for the rubrics is not universally positive. In a survey of faculty awareness, use, and appreciation of the outcomes and corresponding rubrics, we found that faculty who understand assessment and who have used rubrics previously both understand and value the outcomes and rubrics. Those who either did not understand assessment well or who held it in low esteem and those unfamiliar with the use of rubrics as a teaching/learning tool had negative opinions about the outcomes and rubrics. Thus, what we perceive to be an elegant system to promote coherence in the educational experience and to advance the likelihood of improved student learning and performance has received an uneven response from the university community.

A complete set of the rubrics for the six university learning outcomes will be distributed at our session. The writing rubric is included below as an example. Following a brief review of the content and intended use of the rubrics, we will engage the audience in discussion about potential ways to improve the rubrics and/or to increase their impact on student learning. We will also ask participants to reflect on ways such an outcome-and-rubric structure might be received at their institution.

Levels of Writing Quality

"Writing" requires fluency not only in English or another language, but often also in other symbol systems, such as logical, mathematical, visual, spatial, musical, or electronic. Writing quality for course papers will be evaluated using the features defining the four levels shown below. A passing grade for the writing quality of the paper will be achieved by writing at Level 2.

Level	Features
Level 1 Writing (Beginner)	Ill-defined or no thesis
	Unfocused sense of audience
	Inadequate organization and/or development
	Inappropriate or insufficient details to support ideas
	Does not demonstrate understanding of topic beyond a surface level
	Multiple errors in grammar, diction, sentence structure, or spelling
Level 2 Writing (Novice)	Vague purpose or multiple purposes
	Sense of audience wavers
	Evident but inconsistent development
	Does not advance an argument with adequate support
	Demonstrates some understanding of the topic, but does make connections among ideas
	Lack of language facility with frequent errors
Level 3 Writing (Proficient)	Expresses a clear, coherent thesis
	Sticks to the purpose and provides adequate transitions among ideas
	Connects ideas within the material and to other ideas and sources
	Moves beyond surface understanding and demonstrates facility with topical and disciplinary knowledge
	Conveys a sense of audience with appropriate use of disciplinary language
	Advances argument with sound evidence and references
	Readability enhanced by facility with language and sentence conventions
Level 4 Writing (Advanced)	Insightful, creative, or skillfully designed purpose
	Sense of audience demonstrated through form and language
	Demonstrates disciplinary understanding and interconnections; makes links that suggest the discovery of new information or new ways of designing/displaying information
	Effective organization contributes to full development of presentation
	Innovatively or expertly advances argument with well-researched evidence and documentation
	Work enhanced by facility in language use, range of diction, and syntactic variety

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Using the Input-Environment-Outcome Model to Assess Student Growth During College

J. Daniel House
Susan K. Prion

Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that student growth and achievement in college are influenced both by students' entering characteristics when they begin college and by instructional and out-of-class experiences that occur during college. Previous assessments of student growth and progress indicate that characteristics that students bring to college, such as academic preparation, self-appraisals of their academic abilities, achievement expectancies, and career goals, are all related to college progress and outcomes. In addition, there is evidence that specific college experiences are related to student growth and achievement. For instance, activities such as working and commuting that apparently divert student effort from academic involvement tend to be related to lower retention (Astin 1984). Conversely, there are specific activities that are positively related to student achievement in college. Participation in cooperative learning activities are related to improved grade performance and persistence, while involvement in specific social activities appears to be related to students' satisfaction with college and with their intention to persist. Finally, learning activities (giving presentations in class, taking essay exams, and working on independent research projects) that represent individual student involvement appear to be significantly related to student persistence (Astin 1993). There is a need, however, for a methodological framework that enables faculty and administrators to simultaneously assess the unique effects of student characteristics when they begin college and their experiences during college on their subsequent growth and academic achievement.

The Input-Environment-Outcome Assessment Model

The Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) assessment model has been developed as a framework for analyzing the unique effects of student characteristics and instructional activities on the subsequent outcomes of college students (Astin 1991). In many instances, incomplete assessment models are used to examine the effects of numerous factors of student growth and achievement in college. In some cases, only the relationship between input variables (characteristics that students bring to college) and subsequent outcomes are investigated. In other cases, the effects of environmental variables (student experiences during college) and outcomes are assessed. However, in order to fully understand student growth and achievement in college, it is necessary to simultaneously assess the effects of students' initial characteristics and their instructional and out-of-class experiences during college. When using the I-E-O model, the relationships between student inputs and the educational environment are examined, and the relationships between both and student growth and learning outcomes are examined.

Previous studies have used the I-E-O model to simultaneously consider the unique effects of both input and environmental variables on several types of student outcomes. For instance, House (1999) found that several college environmental variables were significantly related to students' degree completion and satisfaction with college, even after controlling for the effects of their entering characteristics. Several input variables (higher grades in high school, higher self-ratings of overall academic ability, and greater expectations of graduating with honors) were significantly related to bachelor's degree completion. In addition, several college experiences (hours per week spent on studying/homework, having worked on a group project in class, being more satisfied with the overall quality of instruction received, and spending fewer hours per week commuting) were significantly associated with undergraduate degree completion even after controlling for the effects of students' entering characteristics. Similar results were also found from an assessment of factors that were related to students' college grade performance. Even after considering the effects of numerous input variables, several environmental variables/college experiences exerted significant independent effects on college grades; those factors included faculty taking a personal interest in students' academic program, the number of hours spent on studying/homework, having worked on group projects in class, and opportunities for working on an independent research project (House 2000).

Assessment Surveys Used

Three specific surveys developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) have been used at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to assess student characteristics, college experiences, and subsequent student growth and academic performance outcomes. The *Freshman/Entering Student Survey* is administered to all entering freshmen during their orientation session prior to the start of the fall semester of their freshmen year. On this survey, a wide range of student experiences and characteristics are assessed, such as values and attitudes, high school experiences, goals and aspirations, and educational and career plans. Assessments have been continuously conducted at NIU for a number of years in order to determine how students' entering characteristics are related to their college outcomes. Several measures of academic performance have been assessed, including grade performance in first-year mathematics and science courses, outcomes in general education courses (House and Prion 1996), and persistence/graduation. These assessments are conducted on a regular basis in order to determine the consistency of patterns seen for multiple cohorts of students.

Second, NIU was one of a very small number of institutions nationally that participated in the two-year pilot study of the *Your First College Year (YFCY)* project. This survey was designed to assess several of the same dimensions as the *Freshman/Entering Student Survey* as well as academic and social experiences during the first year of college. The findings from this assessment were then compiled into a report that was organized according to proposed guidelines for evaluating the first-year experience (National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition 2001). These issues included: (1) academics, (2) campus climate and processes, and (3) student life/campus services. The experiences of NIU freshmen were then compared with the experiences of students at other colleges and universities. These assessment results then provided benchmarks for comparisons regarding specific campus initiatives, such as the development of focused interest groups, the writing across the curriculum program, and the use of technology for academic and personal purposes.

Third, the *College Student Survey* measures more than two hundred college experiences, outcomes, and student changes. This survey was designed to be used in conjunction with the *Freshman/Entering Student Survey*. In this instance, the *College Student Survey* was administered during the first semester of students' third year of college. The results of this assessment provided insights into the academic and out-of-class experiences of NIU students during their first two years of college. The results of this survey also provided the opportunity to examine how students reported that they had changed and grown during their first two years of college.

Because NIU is one of a very limited number of schools nationally that have used all three surveys described to assess students longitudinally to identify factors that are related to student growth, this has provided a unique perspective on student growth and achievement.

Recent Assessment Findings

Students generally experience growth in several areas, including the acquisition of knowledge and critical thinking, the development of self-concept and self-esteem, and the development of leadership and interpersonal skills. In order to facilitate student growth, several types of instructional practices are used and various out-of-class experiences are typically provided. Using the I-E-O model as a conceptual framework, the unique effects of several factors on student growth were assessed. In most instances, students' increased involvement in academic and social activities were positively related to their growth on several dimensions. For instance, several factors–such as faculty taking a personal interest in students' academic program, the numbers of hours per week spent on studying/homework, having worked on group projects in class, and time spent talking with faculty outside class–were all positively related to student growth in problem-solving skills. Similarly, the effects of instructional practices and student experiences on outcomes such as the ability to work cooperatively, the ability to work independently, knowledge of people from different races and cultures, leadership ability, and the ability to work cooperatively were assessed. In addition, the number of hours per week that students spent commuting was negatively associated with student growth on several dimensions. These results indicate that factors associated with academic and social integration into the college experience positively affected students' growth.

Learning Goals

A critical component of student outcomes assessment is the examination of student learning goals. Student learning goals are a statement of expectations regarding student accomplishments or achievements at the end of the learning experience. Several factors are considered during the development of student learning goals. First, university goals from the campus mission statement are examined. Second, the mission statement of the particular academic college or school and faculty discussions within the college/school contribute to the development of student learning goals. Third, the perspectives of the department or academic program are discussed and agreed upon by the faculty. Finally, course-level learning goals are discussed and agreed upon by faculty groups and implemented by individual faculty members.

In order to assess progress toward the achievement of student learning goals, several types of data are typically included in a comprehensive assessment program. Information is needed regarding the students in the courses and academic programs. Data are needed to characterize those students, to examine the skills that they bring to the learning environment, and to know what their expectations are when they begin the course or program. Other assessment data are needed to determine whether students have the necessary prerequisites for the courses or programs. Further, demographic data that enable the institution to know other student needs are beneficial; one example, for instance, is how much students might need to work while they are in school because of financial need and gaps in financial aid.

Another facet of the assessment of student learning goals is to determine how specific student learning goals are accomplished. This is an area where both input and environment variables are important for understanding student outcomes, and the I-E-O assessment model provides a conceptual framework to examine the unique effects of each type of factor. Several types of demonstration and observation outcome measures may be used to assess the accomplishment of student learning goals, including tests, course papers, oral presentations, and performances. In addition, self-report measures can be obtained from the students, faculty, employers, or parents. Tools such as student surveys (for example, the *College Student Survey*); alumni and employer surveys; course-taking patterns, campus climate surveys; and academic program reviews may be used to assess the accomplishment of student learning goals.

Use of Assessment Results

A wide range of college and university faculty and administrators are involved in the assessment of students' instructional experiences and their subsequent growth and achievement outcomes. Further, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the independent effects of students' initial characteristics when they begin college and their subsequent college experiences for explaining those outcomes. The I-E-O model provides faculty and administrators with a more comprehensive assessment strategy for understanding student progress and growth.

Findings obtained using this assessment strategy and results from these surveys have been presented to a number of campus constituencies in order to improve instructional practices, student services, and student achievement. For instance, results from these assessments have been presented to academic affairs staff , such as the provost and provost staff, deans, and department chairs; academic committees, such as the academic planning council, the admissions/enrollment committee, and the university assessment panel; and student affairs staff, such as the student affairs cabinet and the campus ministries association. These assessment findings have also been used to support special academic programs such as the graduate teaching assistant training program and the delivery of training sessions for freshmen orientation course instructors. Consequently, these assessment findings have been considered to support several types of campus initiatives.

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The Five Specters Threatening Your Academic Assessment System

Don Lind
Allene Knedlik

Introduction

All colleges and universities have strategies in place for gauging student academic gains. The design of these plans varying from the simple ones producing limited results to those more elaborate systems involving a broad range of activities and outputs. One thing is certain: there is now a myriad of assessment systems operating with varying degrees of effectiveness. Systems as potentially fragile as these are susceptible to a number of obstacles. These obstacles normally evolve from within unless constantly monitored.

Allen County Community College (ACCC) is a small rural institution in southeast Kansas with limited financial and technical resources. These limitations have been more than offset by the commitment and hard work of both the faculty and administration in their efforts to document student learning gains. Heavily engaged in these processes since 1998, Allen County Community College has encountered nearly every obstacle and disappointment one might expect. Seeing these as challenges rather than obstacles, the college has consistently moved ahead. Not only has ACCC managed to overcome the obstacles, but the college has also gone on to learn from them.

Specters

Obstacles that tend to threaten the effectiveness of an academic assessment plan tend to be rather ill defined and elusive at the outset. In this sense they can be thought of as specters that emerge from within a system and prey on its weakest components. These specters include subjectivity, rigidity, ambiguity, lethargy, and secrecy. Any one or a combination of these specters can seriously jeopardize the ability of an academic assessment system to function to its full capacity.

Table 1. The Five Specters and Their Symptoms

Specter	Symptoms
1. Subjectivity	A. Information submitted by instructors is little more than anecdotal comments that are difficult to systematize.
	B. Some instructional areas are expected to do more than others.
	C. Various parts of the campus submit reports on their own timetable.
2. Rigidity	A. Everyone must assess student gains in the same way.
	B. The system is unchangeable, and suggestions by faculty and students are ignored.
	C. Technology–i.e., computers–may be required, making some uncomfortable.
3. Ambiguity	A. Assessment plan seems to lack direction and appears to be moving in several directions at once.
	B. Poor correlation between assessment instruments and what students are studying.
	C. Data gathered are either not analyzed or analyzed very loosely, so that important decisions are difficult to make.

Specter	Symptoms
4. Lethargy	A. Little if any change comes from assessment activities.
	B. Many faculty and staff are uncertain about their role in the overall process.
	C. Either the assessment committee doesn't meet when needed, or little direction flows from the meetings.
5. Secrecy	A. Lack of consistent published findings concerning student academic gains.
	B. Little if any flow of new ideas, and no ongoing training.
	C. Feeling of remoteness or being cut off on the part of adjunct and/or outreach personnel.

Implementing Solutions

Using Table 1 as a diagnostic tool, one might be able to identify one or more symptoms that may be plaguing your institution's academic assessment program. The next step is to implement solutions for these problems wherever possible. It is important to note that the writer is not recommending dismantling the current assessment strategy and starting over. If the assessment plan at your institution is functioning at all, it is to your advantage to repair the damage and preserve what is working well. This strategy goes a long way in demonstrating confidence and appreciation for the hard work done by the faculty and staff in originally setting up the system.

Suggested Solutions

- **Subjectivity**
    - Student academic gains data are gathered on uniform report forms requiring some form of quantified results where appropriate.
    - All instructional segments are held to the same standards and report findings in ways very similar to other faculty groups.
    - Reports from all areas of the campus due at the same time or at least on a publicly stated timetable.
- **Rigidity**
    - Increased flexibility in the manner in which student academic gains may be measured—i.e., pre/post testing where appropriate, increased usage of rubrics where student activities are more difficult to quantify, as well as portfolios in project- or performance-based classes.
    - Every effort must be made for input by faculty and students, such as input forms to be submitted to the assessment committee, etc.
    - Where assessment systems rely to varying degrees on computerized data analysis or report generation, provide alternate means for submission of information and personnel for data entry.
- **Ambiguity**
    - Where lack of direction for the assessment system abounds, an intense review of the goals set for this process should be considered.
    - Clearly written learning outcomes with associated competencies must be produced, distributed to the students, and used for evaluation purposes. Typically, this is done using course outlines or syllabi.
    - All data collected should be organized, analyzed, interpreted, and shared with appropriate parties in a timely fashion. Effective decision making depends heavily on this process.
- **Lethargy**
    - "Trigger" values should be agreed upon and set. This enables those responsible to automatically take certain actions if values gleaned from data suggest that changes are in order.
    - A well-written manual should be available describing the process of assessment and the responsibilities of all involved, especially the instructional staff.

  - Assessment committees need to elect aggressive, well-organized chairpersons who can keep the committee on task and provide effective leadership when controversies arise.

- **Secrecy**

  - Preferably, each semester or once a year at the very least, reports should be forthcoming from the assessment committee indicating the status of students' gains, how well the instructional processes are functioning, and if changes to the assessment system itself are in order.

  - Flow of information campus-wide is essential. Newsletters, forums, or discussions groups provide excellent means of disseminating critical updates and providing answers to inquiries that may arise.

  - Absolutely critical to the success of any academic assessment program is the deliberate attempt to make the process and the information about the process available to all concerned. This is especially true where there are large numbers of adjunct, part-time, or outreach personnel on distant campuses. Newsletters, special get-togethers and dedicated Web sites can go a long way toward alleviating the feeling that certain persons or groups of people are being left out.

Critical Issues

While previously alluded to, certain functions of any academic assessment system are critical by their very nature and hence bear repeating.

- Systems must produce useful information.
- Systems must be able to suggest changes that would increase gains in student learning.
- Systems must be capable of suggesting changes to the assessment process itself if shortcomings are detected.

These basic characteristics have one thing in common, the need for easily interpreted data. In most cases, useful data are quantifiable data. This takes on special importance when one considers the need for objectivity in setting certain processes into action. With critical levels agreed upon in advance, the system can be made to "trigger" a report or response when particular parameters either exceed or fall short of the critical value, as the case may be.

The quickest way to paralyze an academic assessment plan is to clog its channels with subjective, anecdotal information. This is not to say that such information is valueless. Instructor commentary can play a very important role in gauging attitudes about the system and/or gaining certain insights into potential instructional, curricular, or student problems. While instructor commentary can play an important role in the overall operation, solid hard data are the life-blood of any such system.

Conclusion

Academic assessment programs are people-driven. Such systems are constantly evolving. If timelines and benchmarks (triggers) are not closely monitored, the system will evolve into a sluggish embarrassment that faculty and staff will try to ignore. If maintained properly and continually inspected for the presence of specters, systems such as these can go a long way in promoting instructional quality and student satisfaction.

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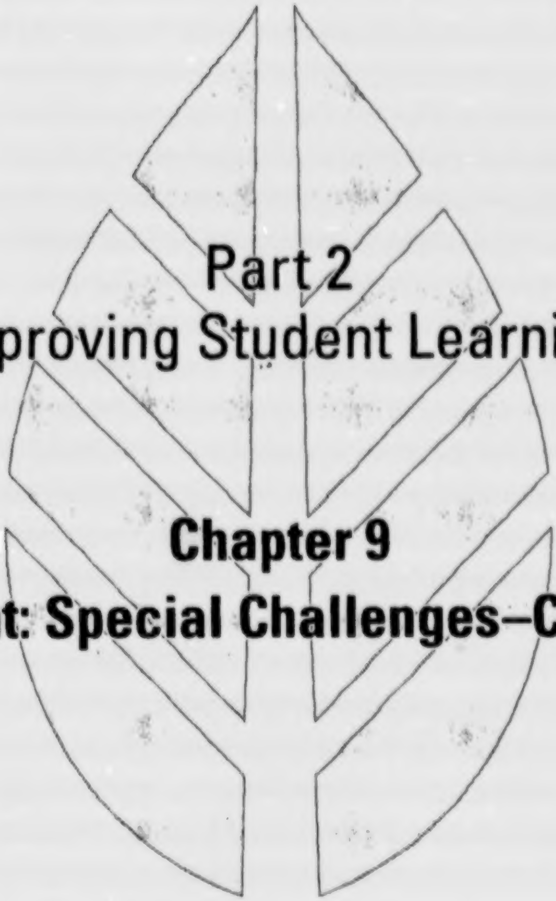

Part 2
Improving Student Learning

Chapter 9
Assessment: Special Challenges–Case Studies

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCA

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Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and the "Swirling" Student

John Neibling
Patricia Medeiros
Thomas Trollen

Scottsdale Community College (SCC) is one of the ten colleges of the Maricopa Community College District, which serves one of the largest metropolitan centers in the United States. The college enrolls more than 11,000 credit students per semester in a variety of curricula. Like most colleges, Scottsdale has been working diligently to create a meaningful and comprehensive student learning outcomes assessment program and has made considerable progress toward this end.

The history of student learning outcomes assessment at Scottsdale Community College is not unlike that of other colleges over the past ten years. The college's last accreditation visit occurred in 1996, at which time Scottsdale was granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years. It was, however, the first year that colleges were expected to have an outcomes assessment program fully operationalized, following the period from 1992–1995, when colleges were only expected to have a plan for outcomes assessment. Like many other colleges in this accreditation cycle, Scottsdale still had some work to do in order to have a comprehensive, systematic student learning outcomes program in place.

Since the 1996 NCA visit, the college has achieved many of it goals in outcomes assessment, including increased faculty acceptance of the program, enhanced support from the college administration, and integration of outcomes assessment into the normal operation of the college. In occupational and developmental education, the college has been able to create assessment systems that continue to provide meaningful information. Even in the area of university transfer education, recent developments in the sharing of student performance at Arizona's three state universities are bringing about a great improvement in the ability of all of the state's community colleges to assess the college's effectiveness.

Recently, however, the college has discovered a new enrollment phenomenon among its students, a pattern of enrollment that has called into question the college's ability to assess student learning meaningfully in the important area of general education. This phenomenon, known as "swirling," is the practice of many of the college's students, especially those taking general education courses, of being simultaneously or alternately enrolled in a variety of colleges and universities in a large urban center. This enrollment pattern has made the task of assessing outcomes in general education much more difficult for Scottsdale Community College, as well as all of the Maricopa community colleges.

In the process of grappling with student learning outcomes issues, particularly those associated with general education, the faculty leadership at the college has come to realize that students in a large urban, multi-college district behave much more like consumers visiting a variety of malls. They base their enrollment decisions on preference and convenience, rather than institutional loyalty. They "swirl," taking classes at various colleges and, thereby, they thwart the college's effort to assess the effectiveness of the learning program at any particular college.

The swirling phenomenon is clearly illustrated by enrollment data from the fall semester of 2001. Of the 11,892 students enrolled in credit classes at Scottsdale Community College, almost one-third fit the definition of the "swirling" student. Within the three years prior to the fall semester of 2001, 3,073 students, or 26 percent, were enrolled in one of the other nine Maricopa colleges. Even during the semester in question, 760 students were simultaneously enrolled at one of the other district colleges. Therefore, nearly one-third, or 32 percent, of the college's students could be defined as swirling.

Exacerbating the problem is Scottsdale Community College's close proximity to one of the largest universities in the United States, Arizona State University, located only a few miles away in Tempe. Many of the college's students are co-enrolled at ASU while they are students at SCC. Others move back and forth freely, spending one semester at the community college and the next one at the university, only to move back to the community college for another semester. All the while, they are taking courses on the freshman and sophomore levels. Assessing them as if they are Scottsdale Community College students exclusively would not produce any meaningful information about student learning outcomes in the general education program at the college.

Although this phenomenon had been noticed previously, it was not until very recently that its implications for student learning outcomes assessment was realized. The effect of this realization is that it is futile at such colleges to use traditional cohort assessment since there really is no cohort to assess. The issue that swirling raises is how to assess the learning of such students in a way that is institutionally meaningful. Because methods of assessment do not exist on a multi-college level and because each college is separately accredited, an appropriate method of assessment is needed.

In response to this problem, the college's student learning outcomes assessment committee, which is comprised of the college's department chairs, has been working on developing a new model to address the new reality. The committee has had to revisit all of its previous assumptions and propose a new approach to student learning outcomes assessment in the area of general education. In the previous model, the committee had adopted a broad range of general education outcomes. The realization that has been brought about by the recognition of the swirling enrollment of the students is that there are many fewer *general* education outcomes that can actually be controlled and, therefore, meaningfully assessed by the Scottsdale Community College faculty. This realization does not mean that all important outcomes will not be assessed, but rather that the ones that will be assessed at an institutional level will be limited to those for which it can be determined that the college actually delivers enough of the instruction to create a learning outcome to be measured.

To that end, the college has limited its global assessments to three: written English communication, critical thinking, and technology skill and understanding. Measuring other general education outcomes, such as numeracy, oral communication, and historical knowledge, has become the responsibility of the mathematics, speech, and history departments respectively. The department chairs, as faculty leaders, and the dean of instruction, as the chief academic officer of the college, have created two representative faculty subcommittees for written English communications and critical thinking and will create the one for technology skill and understanding in the near future. The charge to the subcommittees is to create an outcomes process for these three cross-curricular general education outcomes, including a rubric for evaluation and an ongoing process of annual assessment. The efforts in written English communication have met with the greatest success thus far, followed by those in critical thinking. Other cross-curricular areas such as multicultural appreciation are also under consideration for such a global assessment approach.

While the college has been rigorously pursuing ways of assessing student learning in content areas, it has also been attempting to adapt a number of its existing faculty development activities into tools for assisting faculty with outcomes assessment. The college's official faculty evaluation system, known as the Faculty Evaluation Process or FEP, has traditionally focused on teaching inputs rather than on student outcomes. Recently, the dean of instruction proposed to use the FEP to measure student outcomes at the classroom and program level, a suggestion that has been received warmly by most faculty. Likewise, the college's most frequently used faculty development activity, the Instructional Skills Workshop or ISW, has readjusted its focus to include a stronger emphasis on the use of student learning outcomes assessment techniques. Insofar as both of these established college systems address the issue of assessing general education at the college, they will be incorporating the issue of assessing the swirling student.

Although the recognition of the phenomenon of swirling is relatively new at Scottsdale Community College, it has already had a significant impact on the college's student learning outcomes assessment program. It has created the realization that there are far fewer aspects of general education that can be measured exclusively at a single college. It has also essentially destroyed the notion that the college can conduct any meaningful *cohort* studies of its general education students. Thus limited, the college has reduced the number of outcomes that it measures in a cross-curricular way, and it has moved to bolster the processes that it uses to conduct classroom- and program-level assessments, since they are seen as the most appropriate way to measure the college's general education outcomes.

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Assessment at Risk: How Campus Events Can Threaten Your Assessment Program

Daniel R. Rice

Introduction

The assessment movement in U.S. higher education has not taken hold as quickly and easily as many had hoped (Ewell 1997, Holyer 1998; National Center for Postsecondary Improvement 1999; Kuh 2001). Some have concluded that the culture of higher education has been the impediment, that in order to make assessment work the institutional culture must be changed (Angelo 1999; Loacker and Mentkowski 1993; Banta et. al. 1996). The Commission on Institutions on Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges surveyed its members in an effort to discover the status of student assessment in that region and learned that the major obstacles, in descending order, were "faculty resistance, lack of resources (time, money, and personnel), poor understanding of assessment principles and practices, and an absence of leadership commitment" (Maki 1999). In the same survey, 92 percent of the responding institutions reported that the extent to which they could demonstrate success with assessment was "'not very well' or only 'moderately well'" (Maki 1999). Others have simply observed that faculty are just too busy with the basic tasks of teaching, research, and service to have time to give much thought to assessment at the program or institutional levels. Little attention has been paid in the literature to the ways in which some of the normal events and transitions on campuses can put assessment programs at risk. (See, for example, three of the most widely known works on assessment–Banta and Associates 1993; Banta et al. 1996; and Palomba and Banta 1999–that make little reference to this concern.) In fairness to these authors, the major focus of their work has been the substance of assessment, itself. One notable exception is Gray and Banta (1997), in which the experiences of four universities are reported.

Peterson (1998) conducted an extensive review of the assessment literature for the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) that revealed serious gaps in our knowledge about institutional support for assessment, including "the organizational and administrative patterns supporting student assessment," the topic of this paper. One result of the literature review was the development of "A Framework of Institutional Support for Student Assessment," including a category titled, "Organizational and Administrative Support for Student Assessment," in which the researchers concluded:

> The literature on student assessment identifies five important dimensions of organizational or administrative behavior patterns that may support student assessment efforts and enhance the likelihood that assessment will contribute to improvements in institutional practice: the institution-wide support strategy for student assessment; institution-wide administrative and governance activities used to promote student assessment; leadership and faculty support for student assessment; planning and coordination of student assessment; and procedures used to evaluate and revise student assessment efforts. (p. 9)

Peterson et al. (1999) then conducted a national survey of colleges and universities to discover "ways institutions have approached and supported student assessment" (p. 9). The resulting database and reports, sponsored by NCPI, provide both practitioners and scholars with a wealth of valuable information about how assessment programs are organized at different types of colleges and universities across the country.

What I continue to wonder, however, is what lies behind the data, especially given that the respondents for the NCPI study were chief academic administrators. The chief academic administrators at some of the universities and colleges at which I have served as a consultant would have supplied answers to the NCPI survey that were very similar to colleagues across the country. However, the real story about the fate of assessment at some of these places is far different than one could ever imagine, based on the responses to the survey. The real story is much more episodic, uneven, and fraught with difficulty, none of which would be evident in the survey data. In reviewing the survey instrument used by NCPI, it is clear that they did not ask questions about the kinds of organizational dynamics and difficulties that are the subject of this paper. This led me to wonder whether my experiences with the way assessment programs actually ebb and flow is that atypical or, as I suspect, is actually quite common. While the kind of "objective" data gathered by the NCIP study is valuable in giving us a profile of national patterns, the need for more dynamic and process oriented studies from the trenches of real-world experience may be equally useful to those at all levels who have some responsibility for and interest in the fate of student assessment in colleges and universities across the country.

This article explores, through a case study, how an outstanding assessment plan was placed at risk. This composite case, based on actual events, is used to illustrate how a series of campus events, some quite common, that occurred over a period of time, threatened the implementation and progress of an assessment program. I alert readers about the types of events that can hold special threats to the viability and success of assessment programs and suggest strategies to avoid or minimize the negative impact of these events. In addition, I use the "framework of institutional support" developed by Peterson and associates to provide a theoretical perspective for this study and to further test the usefulness of the framework.

The Situation

In the early 1990s, Depictive University (DU), a regional university of about 15,000 students (12,000 undergraduate and 3,000 graduate) began preparations for a self-study and site visit by the North Central Association (NCA). Because the year of the visit was the first year in which institutions of higher education would be required to have an institutional assessment plan, a major task was to develop and win campus support for the plan. After a two-year planning period, the campus had an assessment plan that had won the support of the university senate and the central administration. The assessment plan was so well received by the NCA site visit team that, during the press conference at the conclusion of the visit, the plan was listed as one of the ten institutional strengths.

This successful beginning was followed over the next three years by active implementation of the plan. What was in the making, however, was the unfolding of a series of campus events that would place the assessment program at risk. These events included the arrival of a new vice president for academic affairs and provost, a budget crisis in state government resulting in a 5 percent loss of state revenue to the campus, the transfer of administrative responsibility for assessment from a faculty development office to an institutional research office, a change in the faculty leadership on the university assessment committee, and a decision by the president to abolish the institutional research office. While each of these events, taken alone, might not have been insurmountable, the cumulative result was the steady dislocation and weakening of the assessment program at the university. No one ever intended for that to be the consequence of any of these actions and transitions. Each decision made good sense to someone within the university administration at the time. Within a period of a few years, however, an assessment program that began with great promise was in shambles.

How did this happen? How could it have been prevented? Could something like this happen at your campus? What can we learn from this example about how to protect and sustain assessment programs at any campus? We will examine these events more closely.

The Arrival of New Administrative Leadership

At the time of the NCA visit, a new president had been at the university for only a few months. A new president comes to a campus with a set of goals as well as an experience set. At the new president's previous institution, where he served as vice president for academic affairs, the assessment program was located structurally in the institutional research office. At DU, the assessment program was located structurally in the faculty development office. During the planning period and NCA site visit, the campus was being served by an interim vice president for academic affairs. An external candidate was eventually selected to replace the interim VPAA and that person came to office during the subsequent summer.

State Budget Crisis

Midway through the next academic year, the state government faced a serious budget shortfall. The governor announced that he was imposing a 5 percent reduction in all state spending, including spending for higher education. The administration required all campus units to prepare budgets that would accommodate reductions at three levels from a minimum of 5 percent to a maximum of 9 percent. The new president announced that one of the ways the university would deal with this financial crisis was to implement internal reallocation. Over the next three years, two vice presidential positions were eliminated and two colleges were merged with larger collegiate units. As is often the case, the campus became embroiled in debates about whether the campus governance process had been adequately engaged in these decisions. Faculty whose colleges were merged and, in some cases, whose departments were dismantled were occupied with these important matters. This context of significant institutional restructuring and reallocation provided the president with an opportunity to move the assessment program from the faculty development office to the institutional research (IR) office, an office that had recently been reorganized.

Transfer of the Assessment Program

The news that the assessment program was being transferred from the faculty development office to the institutional research office met with a mixed response. Many faculty and deans were so caught up in the wider campus restructuring that this issue did not come to their attention or, if it did, it was not of equal concern to those more immediate and threatening concerns. The new vice president for academic affairs either did not oppose the president's plan, at least publicly, or agreed with it, even though some faculty opposed the move, including the chair of the university assessment committee. Even though the original assessment plan had been approved by the university senate, this change in administrative alignment was never taken to the senate for approval. The president's plan was implemented with little fanfare.

Changes in Faculty Leadership

During this same period, some of the faculty who had been members of the original assessment planning subcommittee and, later, the new university assessment committee left the latter group when their terms expired. The faculty chair of the university assessment committee was replaced when that term expired. Over a relatively brief period of time in institutional terms, the faculty leaders who had designed and implemented the assessment plan and program were no longer involved in those roles. This leadership shift, coupled with the transfer of the program to a different organizational unit with a new staff, meant that very little personal continuity or personal ownership of the assessment plan and program remained.

Another organizational feature of higher education is often overlooked when considering how to sustain innovation, and that is the limited terms of department chairs. At DU, department chairs typically serve three-year terms. While many are reelected and reappointed, there is a significant turnover in these departmental leadership roles every year. The reality is that as many as one-third of the chairs are replaced within a period of three or four years. During the assessment planning phase, significant attention was given to training and assisting department chairs with the development and implementation of assessment plans at the departmental level, as required by NCA, in order to assess student learning in the major. National assessment experts were brought to campus to work with department chairs; each departmental assessment plan was carefully reviewed, and feedback was given to each department. Without continuous attention to the training and support of new department chairs, it would not take long before a significant number of chairs might not be comfortable with leading assessment efforts and with the department assessment program. This single feature of higher education in the United States can be a major impediment to the continued implementation of assessment programs at the most fundamental organizational level in colleges and universities. By the time the IR office was given responsibility for assessment, many of the department chair positions had turned over. The IR staff also received little attention from the central administration on these important matters because the new president was by now caught up in an external threat to his presidency and the new VPAA was struggling to deal with the fallout from the campus restructuring and budget reductions. The university assessment program was one of the last things on the minds of these beleaguered administrators.

Elimination of the Institutional Analysis Office

As the president came under more pressure from external opponents and had to respond to criticism of deficits in two visible campus academic programs, the campus felt under more external threat. More demands were made on the IR office, an office already struggling with multiple demands and very limited resources. The IR office was also required to supply the data used by the administration to make reallocation decisions within this highly charged atmosphere. Even though few decisions were actually made on the basis of these data sets, the perception on campus was that everyone was potentially under threat. The IR office was viewed by some as the messenger bearing bad news. Within this emotionally charged context, the president decided to close the IR office as part of the ongoing restructuring and reallocation. Once again, what would happen to the assessment program was not the first thing on the minds of those involved. By this time, the assessment plan that had a few years before been identified by the NCA team as an institutional strength and that had enjoyed a few years of successful implementation was in shambles. No one intended it to happen.

Lessons to Be Learned

While the dynamics at DU may seem to represent an unusual combination of events, the reality is that most campuses experience some of these same events on a routine basis. What can we learn from this particular case that could help other campuses avoid such pitfalls?

1. Changes in Senior Administrative Leadership May Signal the Need for Vigilance

Gray and Banta (1997) identified "barriers to success" for institutional assessment programs, one of which was changes in institutional leadership (p. 89). Reflecting on the experience of two institutions that were early leaders in the assessment movement, Kean College of New Jersey and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, they noted that "departure of key leaders in these institutions resulted in a diminution of the emphasis accorded assessment on those campuses" (p. 89). Senior administrators who are new to a campus may assume that future success is best achieved by replicating their own experience elsewhere. If something worked well at the previous campus, why not do it the same way at the new campus? Birnbaum (1989) notes that while presidents need not approach each situation as if for the first time, they "must also consider the possibility that important elements of the current situation may be different from those encountered in previous experiences and be sensitive to data suggesting those differences" (p. 225). It was clear that the president wanted to move the assessment program to a different organizational unit because it worked that way at his former institution. The president was not attuned to the ways "important elements of the current situation may be different." This organizational dynamic presents institutional players with a difficult dilemma. Opposing initiatives by new senior administrators is a risky business. Such opposition may be viewed as turf protection and resistance to change. Those who raise concerns about such initiatives may be accused of not being team players. Yet, in the case of DU, the movement of the assessment program when it was working well turned out to be one of the contributing factors to the serious derailment of the program. This example suggests the importance of the need for vigilance by campus leaders when new senior administrators consider making structural changes. Ideally, one would hope that quiet negotiations behind the scenes would result in the avoidance of serious administrative missteps. If that fails, however, perhaps the advice of J. Victor Baldridge (1975) should be heeded:

> The truly dedicated partisan who wants to see changes really work will be a tenacious watchdog, monitoring the steps of the decision, staying on the backs of administrators, and calling public attention to administrative lapses. (p. 387)

While this may seem like advice from another era, the alternative is to acquiesce in a decision that could seriously weaken an important program.

2. Provide for Continuity of Leadership at All Levels

Another factor contributing to the serious weakening of the assessment program was the failure to provide for continuity of campus leadership. Over a period of just a few years, the campus leaders who initiated the planning of the new assessment program were all replaced. In addition to the retirement of the president, the vice president of academic affairs who had worked with the NCA assessment committee retired. The movement of the assessment program to the IR office removed the director of faculty development, who had also chaired the NCA assessment committee, from active involvement in the program. The replacement of the faculty chair of the university assessment committee, as well as the ending of the terms of all of the original members, left the assessment program with no continuity of leadership within the committee. The dean who chaired the NCA steering committee and had some commitment to the assessment plan was embroiled in the merger of her college with another college as a component of the campus reorganization. She had neither the time nor the political capital to expend on protecting the assessment program. Unfortunately, these events all conspired to strip the assessment program of any leadership continuity. If the faculty chair and just one or two Assessment Committee members had been reappointed to ensure some internal continuity, that would have helped maintain some momentum, even if the assessment program had been moved to a different administrative office.

3. **Maintain Clear and Adequate Administrative Responsibility for the Assessment Program**

When the IR office was dismantled the, administrative responsibility for assessment was not immediately assigned to another administrative officer of the university. What followed were several months when various options were under consideration, including breaking up various pieces of the assessment program and assigning them to different units on campus. Responsibility for major data collection was eventually assigned to the registrar's office. Responsibility for some survey work was assigned to a research bureau. This diffusion of program activity resulted in an absence of clear administrative responsibility for the campus assessment program. The most recent guidelines (The Higher Learning Commission 2001) require that "The assessment program is provided with a Coordinator/Director who reports directly to the CAO" (p. 24). The wisdom of that requirement is borne out in the experience at DU. Fortunately, when yet another interim vice president for academic affairs was appointed, that officer assigned responsibility for assessment of student learning to an associate vice president for academic affairs who also, by good fortune, had been a faculty member of the original NCA assessment planning committee. This important step began the process of putting the assessment program back on track.

4. **Understand the Organizational Culture**

Kuh and Whitt (1988) have pointed out that "Institutional policies and practices are culture driven and culture bound" (p. 100). Unfortunately, the wisdom of this insight into organizational life was not fully appreciated when it came to administrative decision making about the assessment program at DU. For example, the staff of the newly reorganized IR office had been moved from a student affairs evaluation office to the new IR office after the former director of that office left the campus to take a new position. What turned out to be important about this staff shift was that the new IR staff had a strong student affairs perspective. The new staff had limited experience in working with deans, department chairs, and rank-and-file faculty members, and were not experienced at working within the academic culture. They were more familiar with a fairly cohesive student affairs culture in which student development was paramount and in which the chain of command was more direct. In the academic sector of the university, assessment was most closely aligned with teaching, but teaching competed for faculty attention with research and service. Certainly, assessment had not yet been fully accepted as an academic value. The university culture placed a high premium on the values of faculty governance, academic freedom, and faculty autonomy, and these values were deeply embedded in the culture.

It is also important to note that the faculty development office, the original organizational home of the assessment program, had a reputation on campus as being a faculty-owned and faculty-friendly office. The director of the office at that time (the author of this article) had served as the chair of the NCA assessment subcommittee and had developed some expertise in assessment. The director served in the office for several years and was well known by the faculty, department chairs, and deans. These factors gave the assessment program a degree of credibility with deans, department chairs, and regular faculty. Therefore, the assessment program was being moved from an organizational unit that enjoyed strong faculty support and ownership to a newly reorganized unit that did not enjoy a history of a strong connection to faculty, and one that was being led by staff from student affairs who were not as well known within the academic sector of the university. The decision to move the assessment program did not take these important cultural perspectives into account. Gray and Banta (1997) discovered that successful assessment programs were characterized by the appointment of "a capable person to lead faculty initiatives" and that "The longevity and comparative success of the programs at these institutions are due in no small part to the consistent leadership these individuals have given over the years and to the support they have received from their presidents" (p. 89).

5. **Protect Assessment Programs in Times of Budget Crisis**

Gray and Banta (1997) also identified changes in institutional circumstances as barriers to success. They noted that, at three institutions described by contributing authors, during times of budget cuts, assessment and evaluation "may be early casualties in that environment." (p. 89). The experience at DU vividly illustrates this point. While the direct budget for assessment was not cut during this period, the IR office that administered the program was eliminated for budgetary reasons, as well as other considerations. The assessment program was an unintended casualty of the budget cutting mindset that gripped the central administration.

Framework Analysis

Returning to the framework developed by Peterson and associates, to what extent do the five dimensions of "organizational or administrative behavior patterns" help explain the difficulties experienced at DU? First, there was "the institution-wide support strategy for student assessment" in the original NCA plan that had both administrative and university governance support. We discover, however, that as time passed, this strategy was eroded and changed without institution-wide involvement. Second, "institution-wide administrative and governance activities used to promote student assessment" also existed initially but began to unravel. The council of deans, for example, approved the original plan but was not formally consulted about the transfer of the assessment program to a different administrative unit or the elimination of the IR office later. Neither was the university senate consulted in advance about these important organizational issues. Third, "leadership and faculty support for student assessment" were heavily involved in the development of the original plan, as required by NCA, but the account above describes how leadership and faculty support for assessment eroded to the point where the program was in peril. Fourth, "planning and coordination of student assessment" were also well attended to in the early stages, but as the institution and its leadership were forced to deal with external threats and internal stress caused by reallocation, careful and deliberate planning gave way to opportunism and neglect. Fifth, and finally, "procedures used to evaluate and revise student assessment efforts" were provided for in a general way in the original plan, but as is often the case in the heat of crises and campus politics, decisions were made without much attention to normal procedures and were not based on careful evaluation of the effectiveness of the assessment effort at the institution. In conclusion, it seems that the five dimensions of "organizational or administrative behavior patterns," while somewhat general, are useful guides to "support student assessment efforts."

Summary

In summary, there are many factors that may contribute to the slow progress that we are making toward fully and effectively implementing assessment of student learning in higher education. One that is often overlooked in the assessment literature is the way in which normal events and transitions on campuses can put assessment programs at risk. Knowing that the wrong combination of events, especially when they have a powerful cumulative effect, can undo even the best-laid plans should make those who care about assessment more vigilant. We have also concluded that the five important dimensions identified by Peterson and associates can provide useful guidance to those who wish to support effective assessment programs. Hopefully bringing these issues to our collective attention might help save viable assessment programs at other campuses across the country, thus ensuring that the assessment movement is able to take firmer hold in our academic institutions.

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Reengineering a Program of Learning Assessment

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More than a decade ago, University of Phoenix was one of the first higher learning institutions to embark on an ambitious program to develop a comprehensive learning outcomes assessment program and an academic administration information system. The initial decision to embark on development of these systems was based at least partially on the knowledge that we needed to demonstrate that our non-traditional teaching and learning model could produce outcomes equivalent to those of traditionally structured programs. More importantly, it provided crucial data for continuous improvement of programs, processes, and services.

Since these initiatives were launched, they have attracted a significant amount of attention and recognition, including commendations from accreditation and regulatory visiting teams as well as from external entities such as the American Center for Productivity and Quality and the American Society for Quality. While there have been incremental changes and improvements since these efforts were introduced, the process has not gone through a thorough review and evaluation.

We have recently completed the arduous process of revising our institution's statement of mission and purposes. Our revised statement makes student learning the primary standard by which we judge our success. Based on this commitment, our ability to assess student learning effectively becomes paramount. The senior academic and administrative leadership of the university recognized the danger of resting on our laurels with regard to learning assessment and decided to undertake a comprehensive review with an eye to reengineering the program.

Early in 2001 we undertook a major process of study, reflection, planning, and action relating to our assessment systems and processes. We began this process by contracting with Peter Ewell and Karen Paulsen of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) in Boulder, Colorado. Both are nationally recognized experts in learning assessment. They assisted us in the design and implementation of the review and evaluation processes. They have provided us with much insight and wisdom, and, with their help, we have substantially redesigned our assessment process.

Our first step was to examine the philosophy and rationale of the assessment and quality management systems we pioneered more than a decade earlier. Our evaluation forced us to develop a more cohesive assessment philosophy that provided the context for these activities. Our consultants led us through the process of articulating anew why we want to assess learning, what resources we were willing to devote to the effort, and the basic principles upon which we would proceed.

We next set out to build a stronger conceptual foundation for our assessment activities. We began by developing university-level learning goals. Each college then added its own programmatic goals to a framework that described the knowledge and professional skills the program intended to foster in our students and graduates. This required that our deans and academic program councils (curriculum committees) clearly articulate program domains and expected student competencies. For some programs–those in professional domains with standards for practice (education, counseling, and nursing, for example)–we also added the requirement of a conceptual framework describing the theory base for program design and delivery.

This has not always been a smooth learning process. As our process has developed, we have enjoyed many spirited discussions and haven't always agreed. There have been a few stops and starts along the way. In the end, however, our participants would agree that we have made significant progress in creating an improved comprehensive assessment program with a much greater shared understanding of goals and outcomes and a stronger theoretical foundation.

In this presentation, we describe the assessment documents that have been created, discuss the components of the assessment program that we are currently implementing, and analyze what we have learned from the experience.

University Learning Goals

The hallmark of a University of Phoenix graduate is solid professional practice grounded in an appropriate body of disciplinary knowledge and skills. To ensure the success of all its graduates in achieving this end, university faculty and administrators have established university-wide learning goals. These goals apply to each student in every program. Every University of Phoenix program has committed to incorporating these five learning goals into their curricula, instruction, and assessment approaches at all degree levels.

1. **Professional competence and values.** Graduates of the University of Phoenix will have mastered a specific array of disciplinary knowledge and abilities, and will be able to apply their knowledge immediately in real-world settings. They will demonstrate values and ethics appropriate to their discipline and engage in lifelong learning to improve their professional competence and practice.
2. **Critical thinking and problem solving.** Graduates of the University of Phoenix will reason clearly and critically. They will be problem solvers, able to identify and evaluate problems, utilize critical thinking skills to recommend and select among alternative solutions, implement solutions, and evaluate the consequences.
3. **Communication.** Graduates of the University of Phoenix will communicate verbally and in writing in a clear, concise, and correct manner. They will use proper grammar and punctuation. They will analyze the needs and abilities of their audiences, choose from a variety of communication tools, adjust the content of messages, and deliver their messages accordingly.
4. **Information utilization.** Graduates of the University of Phoenix will be adept at accessing and utilizing information. They will research issues, gather information from a variety of sources, analyze the plausibility and accuracy of information regardless of source, and utilize information appropriately to address issues or inform action.
5. **Collaboration.** Graduates of the University of Phoenix will work effectively in diverse groups and teams to achieve tasks. They will be collaborators, able to function well in team settings as both leaders and followers. They will respect human diversity and behave in a tolerant manner toward colleagues and those they serve.

Conceptual Framework and Program Domains and Competencies

At University of Phoenix, academic program councils are created to oversee each academic program. These councils are comprised of representatives of both the full-time and practitioner faculties and have responsibility for the content, coherence, and quality of the curriculum. The dean or an associate dean of the college in which the program is domiciled chairs the council.

Each of the academic program councils began an intensive analysis of its program within the context of our identified goals. What do we want students to know and be able to do as a result of our programs? What do "knowing," "doing," and professional "valuing" look like, and how can we operationalize valid measures of these constructs?

This was an arduous undertaking that filled many hours, but most agreed that it was a valuable intellectual exercise for members of the councils. We agreed and disagreed; argued and compromised. In the end, the consensus was that we had learned something valuable about our shared culture and ourselves. The concrete outcome of the process for each program was a document that described in detail its conceptual basis, program domains, and competency statements. The less tangible outcome was a greater shared sense of mission and purpose among the faculty members involved in the meetings.

- ◇ **Domain.** At the highest level of aggregation, the term *domain* will be used to designate an area or topic around which a number of individual outcomes statements can be grouped. Examples might include "planning and preparation" for teacher education, "databases" for IS&T, or "planning and management" for the various business programs. These will be framed as "nouns" and not be constructed as "ability statements." They will, however, include a brief explanatory sentence or paragraph.
- ◇ **Sub-domain.** Some domains may naturally give rise to sub-domains, or areas of greater specialization. For instance, within the hypothetical domain of "management tools," there may come to be agreed-upon sub-domains of

"marketing," and "financial planning." It will depend on the particular domain how it breaks down and whether sub-domains are appropriate. Sub-domains may arise obviously as domains are refined, or they may come into being as a number of competencies seem to group together into distinct areas.

◇ **Competency.** At the lowest level of aggregation, the term *competency* will be used to describe statements of what a graduate of the program is actually expected to know or do. Examples might include "demonstrates solid knowledge of content and pedagogy" for teacher education, "defines terminology associated with the Internet" for IS&T, or "identifies customer feedback mechanisms that create proactive follow-up with customers, including recovery of customer confidence" for the BS in management. These statements should be assessable in combination with others. This means that they should be sufficiently concrete to allow sound assessments to be designed or identified.

Academic program councils were asked to develop domains and competencies in any manner that made sense to them using these general definitions. Most of them began with a basic list of abilities that resulted from faculty brainstorming sessions. These were then supplemented as appropriate by a range of other sources, including professional practice standards, licensure requirements, input from practicing professionals, review of existing course or curricular objectives, and review of existing assignments.

Development of Assessment Strategies

University of Phoenix programs are outcomes-based. As such, faculty members are continually assessing student outcomes each time they enter the classroom, critique a presentation, or grade an assignment. However, in order to retrieve institutional data and support curricular improvement, we needed to identify the methods by which we could assess the program objectives and university learning goals on a larger scale. Here, once again, the advice and direction we received from our NCHEMS consultants were invaluable. We had answered the question of what we want our graduates to know and be able to do through the development process described above; the next step was to determine what that knowing and doing should look like.

Matrices were developed that identified the programmatic objectives and the university learning goals in a particular program. Then the program councils reviewed the current curriculum to identify significant assignments or outcomes from within the courses that demonstrated student achievement of that particular goal or objective. These outcomes were then mapped to the corresponding goal or objective for that program. In some cases, specific assignments that were reflective of the objective were plentiful. In some cases, that outcome was an exam. In other cases, it was a written paper, case study, or research project. In still other cases, this exercise pointed out to us that we did not have assessments that we could link to our goals and objectives. It also illustrated areas of redundancy. This provided the most valuable learning, and the program councils were then tasked with making appropriate revisions to curricula and assignments for better alignment.

As the assessment maps are being completed, the deans' next step is to create centralized assessment committees for a standardized evaluation of the identified outcomes. This part of the process is just beginning. These committees will be comprised of full-time and practitioner faculty teaching in the courses associated with the identified assignments. The committees will be trained in a standardized evaluation of the assignment in order to increase inter-rater reliability. They will then become responsible for the periodic evaluation of a sample of the specific classroom assignment.

While we strongly believe that classroom faculty members are continuously assessing student performance, the sheer number of students and faculty and geographic diversity of the university community make an organized institutional assessment using only classroom faculty unmanageable. It would be extremely difficult to collect assessment data from all classroom faculty and nearly impossible to support measures for inter-rater reliability among thousands of faculty from Hawaii to Puerto Rico. The creation of centralized assessment committees will allow us to form teams of trained faculty evaluators that will assess a representative sample of the identified assignment. This serves a quality assurance function and also helps us to manage our curriculum, making sure that it is accomplishing what we intend.

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Using Staff Focus Groups to Help Design a Plan for Services Assessment

Ann Riley
George Friesen

Background

St. Louis Community College began developing its first district-wide assessment plan in 1996. As a large and diverse urban community college with three main campuses, multiple other service locations, and over 130,000 credit and non-credit students annually, it had many aspects of assessment to address. The primary focus was to be on the assessment of student learning outcomes, and the first district-wide, full-time coordinator of assessment, a faculty member fully released from teaching for this position, was appointed in 1997. As the college faced an accreditation visit from the North Central Association in 1998, the task acquired some urgency. The college chose to use the five-column model as defined by James Nichols (1991). Classroom assessment was modeled on the efforts of Angelo and Cross (1993). In part because the first coordinator was a faculty member, the plan developed had a very academic focus. Assessment of institutional effectiveness did not emphasize assessing the work of support services such as counseling, maintenance and housekeeping, financial aid, libraries, and computer support. The accrediting team that visited in March 1998 identified assessment as one of the areas of concern to be addressed by a focused visit in 2001.

In response to the need for progress, the college appointed a task force on assessment in the summer of 1998. The report of that group, published on the college's newly-developed assessment Web site, considered services assessment to be at the same level of concern as academic and program assessment. The successor to the first faculty coordinator of assessment developed two manuals to assist in implementation of the plan, which was approved by the college governance councils. Despite the creation of a separate plan for services and the inclusion of one representative from college services on the District Assessment Council, which the plan created, very little progress occurred in implementing services assessment.

The Continuing Issues

The district coordinator of assessment continued to be a full-time faculty member on release time. Much in-service education and training was offered to faculty, and funding was available for overload and release time projects related to assessment. The college provided travel funds for faculty to attend assessment conferences, and faculty developed educational materials on assessment for peer education. Much excellent work was done, including a presentation entitled "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Overcoming Obstacles to Assessment" (Adams 1999), which was given at several academic conferences, including the March 2000 North Central Association Annual Meeting.

Only one workshop, repeated several times, was offered on services assessment. As recorded on the college assessment Web site, many services were simply not filling out the forms or doing outcomes-based assessment activities. In 1999–2000, for example, more than 80 percent of faculty participated in assessment, while only about 45 percent of services did. As administrators attempted to discover what was wrong, some staff volunteered that concepts like the definition of an assessment unit were too complex in the existing plan. Other anecdotal reports indicated that the forms were too hard to understand, that "no one" understood what was supposed to be done, that reporting of results was unclear, or that "the whole thing" was too rigid. Many other negative comments focused on the whole process being designed for faculty.

To address the issues, the two college vice-chancellors, for education and business affairs, created another District-wide group to study the problem. This one, however, was to consider services assessment only. With fifteen members, some from each location, and representatives from services faculty and staff, the new group began its work in April

2001. Early in its deliberations, the group decided that reliable information was needed on why the original plan was not being followed. Past surveys had not yielded much information, and many distrusted anecdotal evidence offered by potentially interested parties, some of whom wanted, clearly, to junk the assessment plans entirely. Based on evaluation of the methods available to the group and past experiences of task force members with marketing research, staff focus groups emerged as the chosen means of acquiring the needed data.

Funding for the research was another question. The college is fortunate to have as one of its parts a unit designed to provide corporations with options for education, training and performance improvement, called the Center for Business, Industry and Labor. It operates separately from the main campuses and contracts primarily with businesses. Its services are available to departments within the college at special internal rates, which members of the task force knew from other projects. Once the vice-chancellor of education agreed to fund the focus group research, the group had to work with the focus group facilitator to utilize the process effectively.

About Focus Groups

Focus groups have been a staple of marketing research in businesses for many years. The Advertising Research Foundation (1985) describes them as incorporating "qualitative research" and "qualitative analysis" that have formed the basis for "most historical interpretation." They give as an example of this qualitative data interpretation and analysis Max Weber's 1930 sociological classic, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* (The task force on assessment had no spiritual aspirations, but was glad to learn the approach had such claims to validity.)

The basic premise of a focus group is to have selected, representative people discuss and provide answers to questions. A group of eight to ten participants is the best size, and all must sign a legal release to allow use of their anonymous comments. A group should last from one to two hours and should be led by a skilled moderator using a discussion guide. The sessions are usually audiotaped or videotaped, and are often observed by the client desiring the information and other observers from behind one-way glass. The facilitator develops a written report after the session. Advantages of focus groups include their relative briefness, ease of execution, the possibility of quick analysis, and relatively low cost. The use of a group also allows the information gleaned to be synergistic and spontaneous. Participants' responses often result in serendipitous development of other information, as ideas stimulate each other and conversations snowball.

For a group to be successful, a qualified moderator or facilitator is essential. He or she must be able to establish rapport quickly with the group and encourage free expression. Good listening skills and alertness to nonverbal signals are obviously needed, as is the ability to think and react quickly to unexpected tangents in the discussion. Being instinctive and intuitive are important, and to avoid influencing discussion the moderator must be objective and capable of detaching himself or herself from any personal feelings on the topic. To lessen the impact of possible moderator bias, more than one moderator should be used in large projects with multiple groups.

Preparation is also essential for a successful group. The five preparatory questions are

1. What issues need to be addressed?
2. What type of people should be recruited?
3. Where should the groups be conducted?
4. How many people should be recruited for each group?
5. How many groups should be recruited?

After these questions are settled, the client desiring the information must develop a discussion guide for the moderators to provide a summary statement of the issues to be addressed and to provide a memory aid for the moderator. The client or researcher needs to have a very clear understanding of the objectives of the study.

An effective discussion guide should list the questions or topic areas to be studied beginning with the most general and ending with the most specific. Flexibility on the part of the moderator is crucial; unanticipated issues will surface during the group that may provide valuable information. After developing the discussion guide, recruiting the participants is most important. In marketing research, a screening questionnaire is often used, addressing questions of occupation, product usage, and other demographic information. People should not be frequent participants in groups, or the effectiveness of the group diminishes. Clear and timely communication with the group recruited, which should be at least 25 percent larger than needed, is necessary to provide information on where and when to attend.

The setting should be chosen with sensitivity to regional or internal issues that might have an impact on the participants. An example of this might be to avoid a room with specific associations at an institution, such as the dean's office conference room where interviews take place, or any place that might be intimidating. Participants should be re-screened briefly when they appear, and clearly informed if the session will be audiotaped, videotaped, or observed. An unqualified participant should be asked, tactfully, to leave.

During the focus group, the moderator must convey an accepting attitude and respect for each participant. Questions should be open-ended, and participants should do most of the talking. Everyone should be encouraged to speak, and no one person should be allowed to dominate. As in any good discussion, consensus cannot be forced. When the moderator does the report after the group, he or she can describe the level of consensus reached, if appropriate.

The report is a summary of findings, with a synopsis of the planning process and questions and a listing of results. Findings will include answers to specific questions asked, along with any conclusions and recommendations, and a statement of the limitations of the study. A typical statement is "No representation is made that the results of this study will necessarily be statistically valid or representative of a larger population." Despite the disclaimer, many comments and patterns of comments will emerge as representative of the group queried.

Use of the Technique

The Task Force on the Assessment of College Services worked with a skilled facilitator from the Center for Business, Industry and Labor to develop the list of topics to be covered. A stratified random sample of staff in six job classifications was created to form the three groups the task force would need. The job classifications ranged from first-level supervisors to area directors with district-wide duties. To enable more anonymity and freedom to make possible negative remarks, the groups were mixed with regard to the locations and departments of the participants, but were kept within two classification ranges so no one would be with a person of significantly higher level within a group. The three groups were held at three different locations on three consecutive Thursdays. Times were chosen during the workday that the task force thought would be most convenient based on the job classifications involved. The times chosen allowed for substantial refreshments to be served as an incentive for those selected to attend.

The major issues addressed were:

- Is the current assessment process for services broken?
- What types of information do the service areas need if they are to improve the quality of services provided?
- How should a productive assessment process be structured?
- What do staff members know or think about assessment?

Based on the primary issues, the task force developed questions in sections, examples of which are:

- Why do you think organizations do assessment? How do they use results?
- Why is assessment important?
- Do the current processes provide you with adequate information to do quality improvement?
- What are strengths of the current plan? Weaknesses?
- Did you have any input on the development of the present plan?
- Did you receive any training? Was it adequate?
- How should an ideal plan be structured?
- What types of data and reports are best? How should data be reported?
- Does your department engage in any assessment activities on its own?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

For the group of upper level supervisors, some additional questions were:

- What specific criteria are you presently using to measure the productivity of your area?
- Do you think that a different process should be used for services assessment than for academic assessment?

- How has the college done in building staff ownership of the process?
- What would you do to increase participation?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a location based process?

Results and Their Uses

After the three groups were conducted in July 2001, the task force met to discuss results. The moderator forwarded a cumulative report on the research. The research indicated more cynicism about the assessment process at the upper levels of the organization, where the staff had received the most information. Specific suggestions from staff at various levels indicated a trend toward preferring location-based units for assessment. Much support existed among the staff, especially at the lower levels, for participation in assessment activity. Some even mentioned their involvement in quality improvement efforts in other settings. The forms that units were asked to fill out and submit as part of the existing plan were a barrier, as were the relatively complicated instructions. Perhaps most significantly, no staff reported involvement in the development of the process, and very few had received any training at all.

Using this information, the task force produced a draft report recommending a drastically revised plan. The suggested plan respects the staff interest in and enthusiasm for assessment efforts. It also incorporates expressed preferences for simple forms, a flexible format and schedule, location-based units, more training, simple instructions, no additional confusing structures for meeting and reporting, and greater staff involvement in process design. The draft report was presented for discussion to the college governance councils in November and December 2001, prior to its finalization and submission to the vice-chancellors. The staff council members made comments such as, "It makes so much sense," and "This might actually work for a change."

Availability of research data from the staff itself, and redesign in accordance with perceptions and experiences as reported by staff members who will be required to use the process, yielded a practical, workable plan. Using focus groups to help design an assessment plan, or in other situations to do program or service assessment, combines a proven technique of research with situations unique to higher education to produce practical, user-centered solutions.

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Part 2
Improving Student Learning

Chapter 10
Program Review

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

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An Evolving Assessment Model for Learning Communities

René Hersrud
Lynn Akey

Background

"[L]egislators, parents, governing boards, and students want colleges and universities to reemphasize student learning and personal development as the primary goals of undergraduate education" (American College Personnel Association 1996, 1). Refocusing the nature of undergraduate education encourages creation of learning environments characterized by coherent and educationally purposeful activities, activities that are learner-centered. This movement to learner-centered education includes use of learning communities that integrate living and learning in a community setting. Such learning communities represent an intentional restructuring of students' time, academic credits, and learning experiences to foster more explicit intellectual connections between students, between students and faculty, and across disciplines (MacGregor et al. 1999). Additionally, learning communities have been found to encourage integration of curriculum, help students establish academic and social support networks inside and outside the classroom, and provide a bridge between in-class learning and out-of-class living (Shapiro and Levine 1999).

Located on the bluffs surrounding the Minnesota River Valley, Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU), is a mid-size comprehensive university. Most of the university's 14,000 students come from Minnesota and the upper Midwest, although some 600 international students come from more than sixty countries around the world. The university offers nearly 150 undergraduate academic programs and 71 graduate programs through the specialist degree.

The Learning Communities Program at MSU was begun in 1999 as a joint initiative between the divisions of academic affairs and student affairs, and is aimed at fostering learner-centered education. The Learning Communities Program places small groups of students (a maximum of twenty-five students in each group) into cohorts that are enrolled into three common courses, and clusters these students on the same residential floor.

Students are grouped into learning community cohorts based on broad areas of academic interest reflected in the general education courses associated with each learning community. Since the first learning communities were offered in the fall of 1999, the Learning Communities Program has grown to ten communities, enrolling two hundred entering first year students and involving the participation of thirty-five faculty members from six colleges within the university.

In addition to the structural components of co-enrollment and clustered housing arrangements, peer mentorship and co-curricular experiences play a key role in the program's success. Each learning community has an upper-class student (learning community coordinator) who lives with the learning community and is dedicated to the academic success of all members as they transition to college life at MSU. The learning community coordinator assists each student in setting and achieving academic goals, developing study groups for the community, and planning community events.

Purposes

The Learning Communities Program is intended to promote a variety of activities commonly linked with enhanced general education outcomes:

- Stronger student academic achievement
- Higher levels of student retention

- Greater student-to-student interaction and social support networks
- Increased faculty-student interaction
- Established academic support networks
- Eased transition to college
- Higher levels of satisfaction with college experience

Assessment Methodology

An important part of assessing the effectiveness of MSU's learning communities has been the use of comparison groups. During the 2000–2001 academic year, a total of 237 students were included in the assessment study. Of these 71 were enrolled in learning communities, 123 were enrolled only in the first year seminar course, and 43 were first year MSU students who did not participate in either program (control group).

Data retrieved from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Integrated Statewide Records System (ISRS) was used to compare students entering characteristics, such as high school rank, high school grade point average, and ACT composite scores, for significant differences. In addition, ISRS data were collected to track grade point averages and retention to MSU for comparison across those students enrolled in learning communities and those not enrolled in them.

The College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) and its companion instrument, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), were used to

- compare entering students' expectations of college with their experiences after one semester of enrollment;
- examine differences in satisfaction, involvement, and estimates of educational gains between students who participated in the Learning Communities Program, students who participated in a first year seminar course, and first year students who did not participate in either program;
- compare entering characteristics of students who chose to participate in learning communities with those who did not.

The CSEQ assesses the quality of effort college students expend in using the resources and opportunities provided by the institution for their learning and development. The questionnaire includes a demographic section requesting background information about students; an index of student satisfaction with college; fourteen sections assessing students' involvement in various aspects of college life (e.g., library, courses, faculty, campus facilities, student acquaintances); student ratings of key characteristics of the campus environment; and estimates of student progress toward important educational objectives. The College Student Experiences Questionnaire is widely used, and reliability and validity data are available. In addition, normative data are also available, permitting comparisons between MSU students and students at other institutions nationwide.

The CSXQ is an expectations version of the CSEQ. With the exception of the estimate of gains section described above, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire includes sections corresponding to each section of the CSEQ. The CSXQ assesses entering students' anticipated satisfaction with college, anticipated involvement with various aspects of campus life, and anticipated ratings of key aspects of the campus environment.

The completed CSEQ and CSXQ questionnaires were submitted to Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, School of Education, for data compiling and initial analysis. Additional data analysis was conducted by Dr. Anne Blackhurst, Associate Professor for Counseling and Student Personnel, MSU. All quantitative analyses were conducted through ANOVA procedures, with significance levels of .05.

Qualitative research methods were used (Blackhurst and Akey 2002) to augment quantitative data and provide richer, more complete understanding of students' perspectives about their learning community experiences. During spring semester 2001, twenty fall semester 2000 learning community students participated in focus group interviews. These hour-long, semi-structured interviews were used to create an environment in which students' opinions and perceptions could be expressed openly and explored in depth.

Questions asked of focus group participants included: (1) Why did you join a learning community? (2) What was the best thing about being a member of a learning community? (3) How do you think your first semester would have been different if you had not joined a learning community? (4) If you could change one thing about the current learning community program, what would you change and why? And (5) What would you say to potential students who were interested in hearing about your learning community experience and were considering the decision to join?

Focus group data were analyzed using Vaughn and associates' (1996) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, a five-step process combining elements of the Constant Comparative Method and naturalistic inquiry. Steps 1 through 3 were completed independently by each researcher, while Steps 4 and 5 required negotiation and collaboration between members of the research team.

Results

Comparison of entering characteristics of high school rank, high school GPA, and composite ACT scores between learning community students, first year seminar students, and the control group found no significant differences between the three populations. Analysis of the data collected through the College Students Expectations Questionnaire showed that there were no significant differences in expectations held for their college experience by students choosing to participate in the Learning Communities Program, students who enrolled in a first year seminar course, or student in the control group in all areas of the survey.

☐ Academic Achievement

A primary goal of the learning communities program is to support the academic achievement of first year students. Comparison of grade point averages for students enrolled in the learning communities program, students enrolled in a first year seminar course, and students in the control group show a significant difference. The fall grade point average for learning communities students (3.01) was significantly higher than the fall grade point average for students enrolled in a first year seminar course (2.89), which was also significantly higher than the fall grade point average for students in the control group (2.65). In considering the impacts of the program over the course of an entire academic year, academic achievement continues to be seen at the completion of the following spring term. Students who participated in the learning communities during the fall term had a spring term grade point average higher than students who were enrolled in a first year seminar course during the fall term, and this grade point average is also higher than that of the control group (see Appendix).

☐ Retention

A second goal of the learning communities program is to retain entering first year students at MSU. Return rates were recorded from the fall 2000 semester to the spring 2001 semester as well as from the fall 2000 semester to the following fall 2001 semester. In both cases, the retention rate for learning community participants (95.7 percent and 88.7 percent) was higher than for students enrolled in a first year seminar course (92.8 percent and 82.5 percent) and also for students in the control group (91.1 percent and 77.7 percent) (see Appendix).

☐ Faculty Interaction

The focus on faculty interaction with learning community students is central to the goals of the program. Results from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire show that students in the learning communities program and students enrolled in a first year seminar course have significantly more experiences with faculty than students in the control group. In particular, learning community students and first year seminar students talked with an instructor about information related to a course they were taking; discussed career plans and ambitions with a faculty member; and talked with a faculty member, counselor, or other staff member about personal concerns significantly more often than students in the control group. In addition, learning community students socialized with a faculty member outside of class and participated with other students in a discussion with one or more faculty members outside of class significantly more often than students in a first year seminar course or students in the control group.

The effect of the opportunity to socialize and make connections with faculty was evident in the focus group interviews. Students spoke of the value of these relationships, particularly in terms of demystifying and humanizing their professors:

> "I think it was different to see how [faculty] really are . . . like who they really are and how they really act when they are not in the classroom setting. Like maybe you really don't like your professor at class, but then if you get to meet with them and have pizza they are probably one of the nicest people you've ever met. It's just a chance to see how they really are."

> "It was nice to see [our professor] out of the classroom and actually, like, talk to us and interact with us as people instead of as students. And so I thought that did make an impact because it gave [faculty] a human side as teachers not like a scary monster."

In addition to helping students view their professors in a more realistic light, out-of-class interaction with faculty members convinced students that faculty saw them as individuals and cared about them personally:

> "I thought [interacting with faculty outside of class] was really neat because our anatomy class was like 150 students. So you at least got to know the professor on a one-on-one basis, and they knew who you were. They know your name. It's nice to know they know who you are and you're not just a number."

Further analysis of variables related to retention, academic achievement, and faculty interaction found that learning community students' experiences with faculty were significantly related to student grade point averages, student satisfaction with the university, and student retention.

☐ Student-to-Student Interaction and Social Support

In assessing student interactions and the development of community, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire found that students in the Learning Communities Program were significantly different in several areas. Learning community students and students enrolled in a first year seminar course met other students at campus locations for a discussion and asked other people to read something they wrote to see if it was clear to them significantly more often than students in the control group. Also, learning community students participated in student clubs and organizations and became acquainted with students whose interests were different then their own significantly more often than students enrolled in a first year seminar course or students in the control group.

Focus group interviews found that the learning communities facilitated social integration and the development of community. Almost without exception, interview participants mentioned the benefit of having an instant reference group or belonging place provided through their learning communities:

> "I was really nervous about, like, what's going to happen if nobody likes me…[The learning community] made it so much easier, because you are almost forced into making friends."

> "I joined to meet people and to have classes with people I lived with, so I wasn't so nervous about making new friends and breaking away from my high school friends."

For many, the social network that originated within the learning community eventually extended beyond:

> "[Without the learning community], I don't think I would have gotten to know as many people as I did…because for every one person on our floor, I think I've met 10 others."

The bonds forged with other members of the learning community progressed beyond social ties to a genuine sense of community. Students discussed the sense of trust and teamwork they shared with their learning community cohorts, using words like "family" and "neighborhood."

☐ Academic Support Network

Focus group interviews found that students felt empowered to participate in class and were more engaged in the learning process due to their relationships with faculty and students:

> "If I feel I have an answer [in class], I can share and have the support of the people around me, and you know that everyone won't be laughing at you. You don't feel so bad answering questions wrong when there are people around that you know."

This finding supports the results of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire that reported that learning community students significantly more often contributed to class discussions than students in the first year seminar or the control group.

One of the primary benefits of these relationships was the confidence to approach a faculty member with questions about course material:

> "Professors get to know us better. They know who we are and that helps make you feel more in control to go ask questions and stuff."

Another benefit of the relationship with faculty was that this helped to personalize the learning process:

> "I felt like the professor was actually talking to me [during class lectures] rather than just talking over our heads."

> "The faculty made it seem like we were both working towards me getting an education instead of just me working and them judging."

Students' increased engagement in the learning process did not end when they left the classroom:

> "[The learning community] really helped me studying for tests and stuff first semester. We all met down in the lounge, and we sit there and study together and throw questions around and stuff."

In some cases, the lines between in-class and out-of-class learning became so blurred that students stopped viewing their in- and out-of class activities as separate and saw the experience as fully integrated:

> "With human anatomy...it got to be like our learning community was our lab. And [it is] the same way this semester."

☐ Transition to College

In the focus group interviews, a frequently cited reason for joining the learning community—as well as a frequently cited benefit of membership—was that the learning community helped ease the transition from high school to college:

> "I wanted to start off the right way. You hear all of the stereotypes of freshmen dropping out of school after their first year...half the freshmen are on academic probation, half of them don't even make a 2.0 their first semester 'cause they don't have any structure. And not all of that is true, but some students that I know have dropped out or are on academic probation, and here I am. And I think part of the reason I am doing so much better is because I had some sort of structure and direction when I got here."

When discussing the transition to college and the difficulty of navigating an unfamiliar system, many students mentioned the benefits of the informal advising and mentoring provided by the upper-class students who served as learning community coordinators (LCCs):

> "I think [our learning community coordinator] has been a mentor to all of us. She constantly comes in and checks on us. Whether it be scheduling, how your life is going, how your family life is going, work or job is going, problems, other things...you know, everything."

One student's assessment encapsulated the sentiment expressed throughout the focus groups:

> "If I hadn't been in the learning community, I think I would have been lost."

☐ Satisfaction with the College Experience

Satisfaction with the college experience became evident in the results of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. Both learning community students and first year seminar students reported that they liked college significantly more often than did students in the control group. In addition, when asked whether, if they were to start their education over again, they would select MSU, learning community and first year seminar students selected MSU significantly more often than did students in the control group.

Conclusions

Based on the results described above, the outcomes established for Minnesota State University's learning communities are being achieved by the students participating in them. When compared to other new entering freshmen, significant differences were found in learning community students' academic achievement, interaction with faculty, interaction with other students, and satisfaction with the collegiate experience. Of particular power is the quality of learning community students' relationships with faculty; this relationship was shown to be significantly related to academic achievement, student retention, and student satisfaction with the university. This power of relationship is reiterated and given description in students' comments across all of the questions contained in the focus group interviews.

These findings are congruent with much of current learning community research. They are also consistent with the writing and research of experts in college student development and learning. In summary, college students need relationships that support transition, risk-taking, engagement, and learning. Those who administer and provide programs of higher education are the sources of such relationships. The challenge is to be aware of the quality of relationship we demonstrate, and to provide the kinds of learning environments in which effective academic relationships can thrive.

Continuing refinement of the research questions associated with the Learning Communities Program will also be important to continued success of the program. Eliciting more specific information about various factors within program elements identified as influencing student achievement, satisfaction, and retention will enable the program to build on its strengths. Initiation of longitudinal research will help determine whether program effects are sustained throughout the college career. Finally, gathering information about the faculty experience within learning communities will support continuing faculty development efforts.

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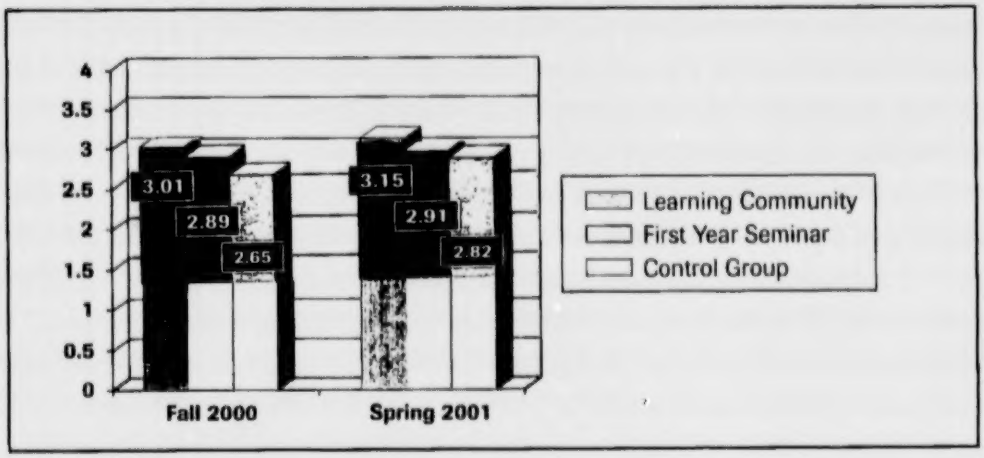
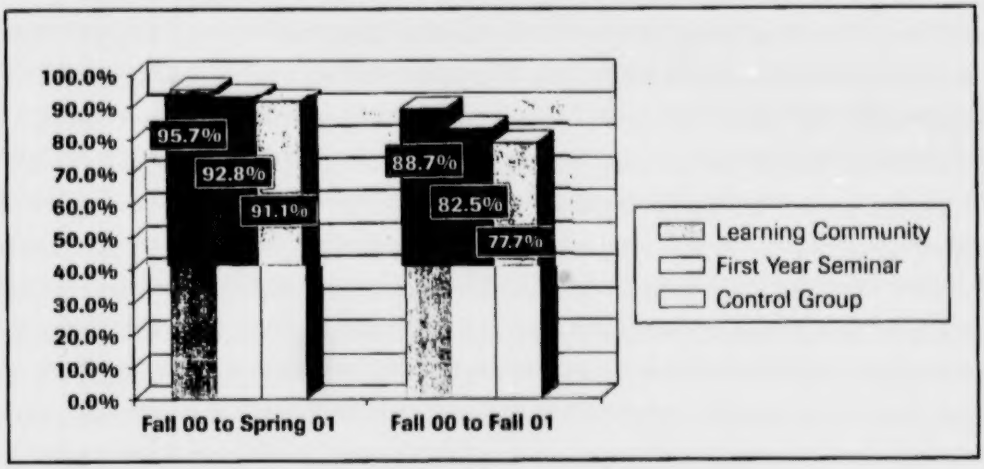
Appendix

An Evolving Assessment Model for Learning Communities

Grade Point Average Comparisons for Learning Community, First Year Seminar, and Control Group Participants



Retention for Fall 2000 to Spring 2001 and Fall 2000 to Fall 2001 for Learning Community, First Year Seminar, and Control Group Participants



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Improving Student Learning by Closing the Feedback Loop: Action Research within the English Discipline

Jean Evens
Susan Hawkinson
Barbara McDonald

Background

In 1997, Itasca Community College (ICC), located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, embarked on a mission to create a campus-wide assessment program. One of the first major tasks of its assessment committee was to facilitate the development of an ICC educational philosophy and a related statement of foundational general education goals and outcomes. The committee accomplished this task by hosting a general education duty day, in early 1998, with an educational consultant who helped all faculty and staff employ the college's mission, vision, and values statement as a starting point for the development of the philosophy and general education outcomes statement. After much brainstorming and discussion, the committee surveyed faculty and staff regarding what they thought students should learn while at ICC. After compiling the survey results, an ad hoc committee of faculty and staff drafted a philosophy and outcomes statement, sent it to the faculty for suggestions and recommendations, conducted a special faculty association meeting on the topic, and submitted a revised statement for approval at a regular association meeting. The faculty association approved the following Itasca Community College Educational Philosophy statement in May 1998:

> Itasca Community College affirms its commitment to a broad and coherent foundation of general education, which is fundamental to educational opportunity, individual enrichment, and citizenship. Our graduates will acquire the intellectual and practical essentials to create and adapt to our diverse society, now and in the future. These essentials include skills in or knowledge of:
>
> - communication,
> - critical thinking,
> - information technology,
> - mathematical/scientific reasoning,
> - citizenship and ethics, and
> - diversity.

In addition, the association approved a more detailed list of expectations related to the six skill areas bulleted above, which became known as the ICC Foundational General Education Goals and Outcomes. Goals and Outcomes for Communication are as follows:

Communication

◇ **Goal:** To develop students' skills in the use of written and oral language in the various contexts of personal and professional life.

- **Students will be able to:**
    - Read, evaluate, synthesize, and apply information from a variety of sources.
    - Understand/demonstrate the writing and speaking processes through planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing.
    - Write and speak clearly, concisely, and accurately in a variety of contexts and formats.
    - Employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic disciplines and the professional world.
    - Participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding.

Since 1998, ICC faculty members in various disciplines have linked the six Foundational General Education Goals and Outcomes to course-level outcomes and assessment methods across the curriculum. In 2000, with the support of funding initiatives for assessment research, faculty members began to move beyond assessment of individual students in the classroom toward a more comprehensive "second look" (Banta 2000) at institution-specific outcomes and how to demonstrate that students are reaching satisfactory levels of competence related to those outcomes. Through an assessment research project, faculty within the English discipline, in particular, have shown how action research can be used to demonstrate "that students are learning what we say they are learning" and how results can spark improvements in areas of concern.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to provide information about Itasca Community College students' written communication skills, especially their ability to "write ...clearly, concisely, and accurately in a variety of contexts and formats" and to "employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic disciplines and the professional world" as stated in the ICC Foundational Goals and Outcomes for Communication. The study compared individual students' performance over time as well as the performance of developmental versus college-level writing students.

Methodology

English faculty, the director of institutional effectiveness, and the academic dean of the college worked together to develop a composition rubric (see Appendix) to evaluate students' written performance in response to a standard prompt. The rubric divided the writing process into six components: (1) attention to prompt, (2) thesis, (3) thesis support, (4) organization and transitions, (5) word choice and sentence structure, and (6) grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Each component contained a six-point anchored scale for evaluation purposes. Evaluators also used the rubric to record a holistic score.

In fall 2000, all expository writing (Engl 1101) and developmental writing (Engl 0091) students at the college responded to a standard written prompt, both at the beginning and the end of the semester. The beginning-of-semester prompt asked students: "Imagine you are burying a time capsule containing three items that will represent society in the year 2000. Which three items would you choose and why?" The end-of-semester prompt asked students: "What are three ways that you expect college to make a difference in your life?"

English faculty used the composition rubric to evaluate a random sample of forty pre-post pairs of Engl 0091 essays (approximately 35 percent of total course enrollment) and eighty pre-post pairs of Engl 1101 essays (approximately 25 percent of total course enrollment). All identifying information, including student names and course levels, was removed from essays prior to evaluating them. To ensure consistency in the application of the rubric, a minimum of two instructors read each essay and recorded their evaluations separately. Average scores across both readers were recorded as final essay scores. When two readers disagreed by greater than one point on any component of the rubric for a given essay, a third instructor read the essay and resolved score differences.

Results

Figure 1 compares the average pretest essay scores of developmental (0091) and college-ready (1101) English students. Generally speaking, these scores indicate that college-ready students performed significantly better than

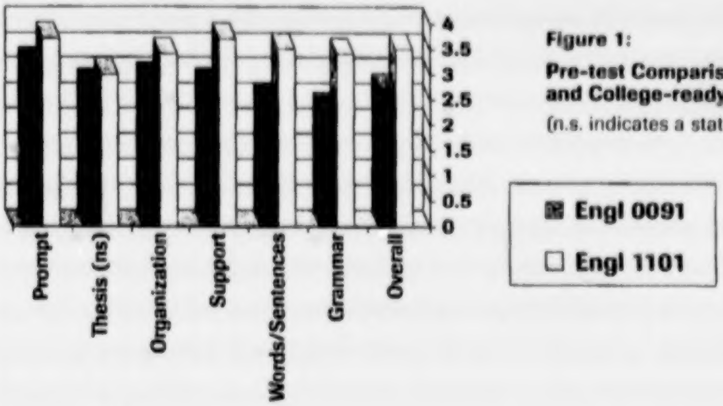


Figure 1:

Pre-test Comparisons of Developmental (0091) and College-ready (1101) Essay Scores

(n.s. indicates a statistically nonsignificant result)

developmental students on overall writing ability at the beginning of the semester, except on the thesis-writing component of the writing process. Differences between developmental and college-ready students were especially pronounced in the areas of thesis support; word choice and sentence structure; and grammar, spelling, and punctuation. These results imply that students had been appropriately placed into developmental (0091) versus college-level (1101) writing courses at the college.

Figures 2 and 3 compare average pre-test and post-test essay scores of students who enrolled in either Engl 0091 or Engl 1101 during the fall semester. These figures indicate that, over the course of one semester, students in both

Figure 2:

Pre-test and Post-test Comparisons of Developmental (Engl 0091) Essay Scores

(n.s. indicates a statistically nonsignificant result)

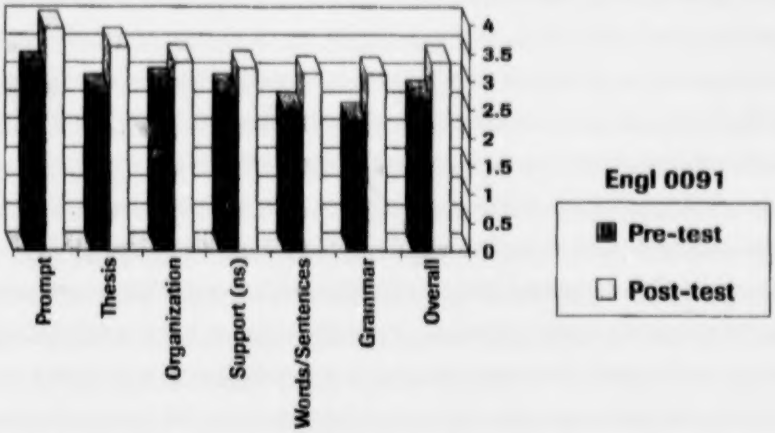
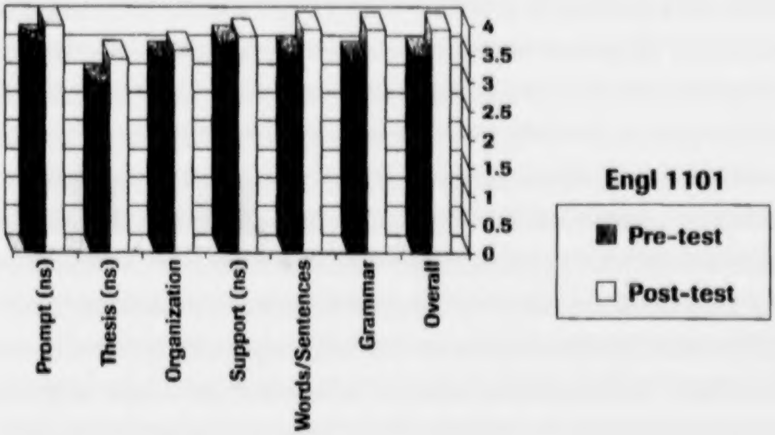


Figure 3:

Pre-test and Post-test Comparisons of College-ready (Engl 1101) Essay Scores

(n.s. indicates a statistically nonsignificant result)



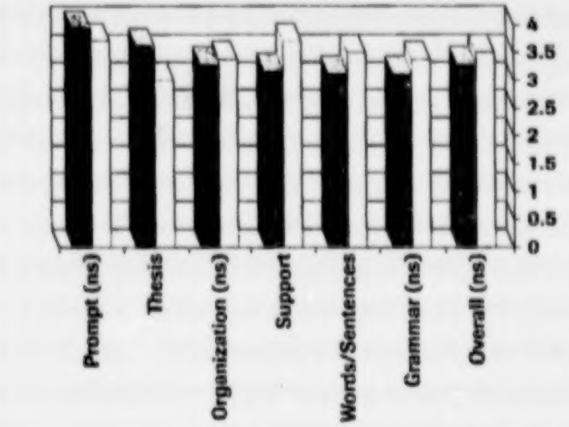


Figure 4:

Comparisons of Developmental (0091) Post- and College-ready (1191) Pre-test Essay Scores

(n.s. indicates a statistically nonsignificant result)

courses significantly (p<.05) improved their overall writing ability as well as their performance on many particular aspects of the writing process. Improvements were most dramatic for students enrolled in developmental writing (0091), where significant gains were made in all areas except thesis support. Students enrolled in expository writing (1101) also made significant gains in organization, word choice and sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and overall writing ability. As was true of developmental students, college-ready (1101) students made the smallest gains on the thesis support component of the writing process. One implication of this finding is that instruction related to thesis support may need to be enhanced in future English writing courses at the college.

Figure 4 compares average expository writing (1101) **pre**-test essay scores and average developmental writing (0091) **post**-test essay scores. In general, these results indicate that there was no significant difference in overall writing ability or in performance on many aspects of the writing process between students who completed the developmental writing course and students who entered the college-ready course directly (most fall semester students enter Engl 1101 without completing Engl 0091 first). This finding strongly implies that Engl 0091 adequately prepares developmental students to enter the college-ready Engl 1101 course. Where significant differences (p<.05) were found, Engl 0091 completers performed better than Engl 1101 entrants on writing a thesis statement, but not as well on thesis support and word choice and sentence structure. Two implications of these findings are that (1) thesis support and word choice and sentence structure may need additional attention in Engl 0091 courses, and (2) writing a thesis statement may need review in Engl 1101, especially with students who enter the course directly without taking Engl 0091.

Figure 5: Inter-rater Agreement for Communication Rubric

	Pre-test	Post-test	Overall
Attention to Prompt	89%	86%	87.5%
Thesis Statement	84%	80%	82%
Support of Thesis	96%	93%	94.5%
Organization and Transitions	94%	94%	94%
Word Choice and Sentence Structure	89%	92%	90.5%
Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation	94%	94%	94%
Overall (Holistic) Score	94%	93%	93.5%

Figure 5 shows the interrater agreement for all components of the communication rubric. Inter-rater agreement for this rubric was very good, ranging from 80 percent to 96 percent across all scoring components. Because reliabilities were consistently lower than 90 percent for the *Attention to Prompt* and *Thesis Statement* components, however, these scales were revised before the rubric was used again to promote greater clarity and consistency of use. Also, because reliabilities for the Support of Thesis scale were very high, even though students showed less progress on this component than on all the others, the implication is that there is a lack of student progress in this area, not just a problem with the rating scale.

Closing the Feedback Loop

Once the data analysis was completed, the English faculty was eager to make sense of the results on both a practical and an applied level. On the one hand, the study helped to validate the faculty's work, providing quantifiable evidence that students were appropriately placed into developmental or college-level classes, and that those students made significant academic progress over the course of a semester. In addition, the positive outcomes helped to validate the results of a self-reported general education survey distributed to graduating ICC students in the spring of 2001, in which they perceived significant academic growth in writing skills during their tenure at the college. However, *more important* than supplying evidence that students were learning according to expectations, the study provided the chance for English faculty to take a second look, a chance to see where improvements could be made. In examining these results, faculty noticed gaps in student learning in the area of thesis development and support among Engl 1101 students—a wonderful example of the power of a feedback loop through action research. The English faculty members recognized the need for a follow-up study to address these concerns. So, in the fall of 2001, they applied for a small faculty research grant to examine teaching strategies designed to improve thesis development and support. Faculty committed to discussing shared methods of addressing these shortcomings, refocusing course delivery and instructional techniques, and conducting a follow-up study comparing thesis improvements based on these instructional changes. Results are forthcoming in the spring of 2002.

Experiencing the powerful impact action research could have on creating a collective culture of assessment within an academic area, the English faculty, along with the director of institutional effectiveness and the dean of academic affairs, presented the results of the study to all ICC faculty and staff at a fall 2001 duty day and at a regional Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Assessment Workshop in Bemidji, Minnesota, in the spring of 2001. ICC faculty members outside the English discipline were intrigued by the results, and several began to discuss or develop similar pre-post studies for their academic areas.

Closing the feedback loop through action research has allowed faculty to feel ownership in the outcomes of ICC's foundational goal areas, and the college's educational philosophy from which they stem. For ICC faculty, this study provided an interesting and acceptable mechanism for building a feedback loop to improve individual students' performance at the classroom level, and to improve teaching pedagogy within one discipline at ICC. This study also resulted in an action research model, which has had a significant impact on faculty enthusiasm and involvement in ICC's assessment initiatives, and has proven to be a vehicle for renewal in the area of teacher performance. Most significantly, the study has provided support for ICC's institutional effectiveness vision as the college moves forward in developing a comprehensive and sustainable assessment program across all discipline and program areas.

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Appendix

Improving Student Learning by Closing the Feedback Loop: Action Research within the English Discipline

Composition Scoring Guide

Attention to Prompt	Writer fails to address prompt 1	Writer distorts or neglects part of prompt 2	Writer partially addresses prompt 3	Writer adequately addresses prompt 4	Writer responds clearly to prompt 5	Writer responds carefully and creatively to prompt 6
Thesis	Thesis is missing 1	Thesis is unclear or too general 2	Thesis fails to address all parts of prompt 3	Thesis is clear and consistent with prompt 4	Thesis is fresh and engages the reader 5	Thesis is an authentic, fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking 6
Organization and Transitions	Writer does not attempt to organize writing and does not use transitions 1	Writer's attempts at organization fail and transitions may be missing 2	Writer makes some successful attempts to organize writing and uses weak transitions 3	Writer demonstrates clear organization and uses adequate transitions 4	Writer demonstrates clear and coherent organization and uses strong transitions 5	Writer demonstrates clear and coherent organization and uses superior transitions within the context of more complex writing 6
Support of Thesis	Writer does not support thesis 1	Writer offers inadequate examples and details as support 2	Writer offers some examples and details as support 3	Writer offers sufficient examples, details, and reasoning as support 4	Writer offers insightful examples, details, and reasoning as support 5	Writer offers superior examples, details, and complex reasoning as support 6
Word Choice and Sentence Structure	Writer's word choice and sentence structure are severely limited 1	Writer's word choice is limited and sentence structure lacks variety 2	Writer's word choice is adequate, but sentence structure lacks variety 3	Writer's word choice is appropriate and sentence structure is somewhat varied 4	Writer's word choice is somewhat sophisticated and sentence structure is varied 5	Writer's word choice and sentence structure are sophisticated 6
Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling	Grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors make paper difficult to follow 1	Writer makes numerous grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors 2	Writer makes some grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors 3	Writer makes a few grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors 4	Writer makes a few grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors in the context of more complex writing 5	Writer makes virtually no grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors 6

Wholistic Rating for Composition: ____________

Supporting Program Decisions with Assessment Data

William E. Roweton
Thomas K. Krepel

Each year, postsecondary educators invest precious institutional resources to assess student learning in annual program evaluations. These expenditures underwrite assessment activities for institutional accreditation and, when pursued tenaciously, for data-based program decision making.

The exciting rhetoric justifying assessment cools over time for many institutions. Initially, colleges and universities begin or revitalize their assessment plans with great hopes. Eventually, without sustained institutional commitment, annual assessment rituals come to represent expensive but not particularly informative routines.

As enthusiasm wanes, even remarkably detailed multi-method assessment plans may often yield no more than arithmetic means and standard deviations generated from psychometrically untested protocols. Furthermore, "major decisions about assessment...," Astin (1993, 94) wrote a decade ago, "are made with little or no thought given to matters of [data] analysis and utilization."

Can averages and commonplace standard deviations of ordinal data produced quasi-experimentally from face-valid attitude surveys tell us enough to justify program decisions? Will protocols cooked up at home detect subtle performance shifts?

To paraphrase one disgruntled empiricist (cited in Saxe and Schoenfeld 1999), accepting just any investigative methodology to disentangle a complex question encourages a "research" culture of artistry and intuition rather than rigorous experimentation and robust theories.

Problem

Inconsistencies are commonly encountered in single academic assessment plans. Contrast detailed program assessment designs to psychometrically unrefined protocols. Now, add simplistic data analyses. Often, one institution's assessment plan orchestrates components with uneven levels of sophistication and usefulness, and claims about results are not well supported, conceptually or stochastically. Complex data arrays should follow sufficiently powerful program evaluation designs and marshal contemporary statistics. In many postsecondary assessment plans, they may not.

Solution

This presentation proposes one strategy–long-term cooperative education–for enhancing program evaluation data analyses. Small faculty teams consisting of statisticians (and/or psychometricians) and departmental or discipline specialists. These cooperating groups include individuals who are "skilled" with numbers and others whose scholarship values non-quantitative epistemologies.

Cooperative learning models build from educational research beginning in the 1970s (Slavin 1995). Unique cooperative-learning methodologies, each reflecting different instructional goals, are tagged with descriptive labels, such as "Student Teams-Achievement Divisions" (Slavin 1980), "Teams-Games-Tournament" (Slavin 1980), "Jigsaw" (Aronson and Goode 1980), "Learning Together" (Johnson and Johnson 1994), "Group-Investigation" (Sharan and Hertz-Lazarowitz 1980), and "Co-op Co-op" (Kagan 1985). All of these methodologies share strategies to motivate, build groups, and assign tasks.

In this paper, cooperative academic groups begin with mutually understood conceptual questions about program assessment and a jigsaw-task approach. Conceptually to begin, we suggest four questions (see Table 1).

Table 1
Focus Questions

Number	Question
1.	Are average differences in student performance before and after the course important?
2.	Is the magnitude of student learning practically significant?
3.	Is sampled student performance representative?
4.	Did instruction cause student learning?

To continue, representatives of statistical and the non-statistical epistemologies develop cooperatively a common understanding for each question. Last, responses representing each perspective surface for each question as team discussion proceeds.

To enhance individual and team motivation, each participant, regardless of his/her training, should *relate* and *respond* meaningfully to each assessment question (see Table 2). Ultimately, blended epistemologies compel the most effective data analyses, and the interdependent components of assessment–questions, methodologies, and data–will profit from balanced academic appraisals.

Table 2
Illustrative Responses to Focus Questions from Non-Quantitative and Quantitative Epistemologies

Non-quantitative Response	Focus Question	Quantitative Response
Experiential judgment	*Are average differences in student performance before and after the course important?*	Performance assessment
Subject-area literature	*Is the magnitude of student learning practically significant?*	Effect size
Credibility	*Are sampled student performances representative?*	Error
Logic	*Did instruction cause student learning?*	Causal modeling

Method of Presentation

This session proceeds through a set of "fabricated" data and analytical steps where small teams of four to six individuals discuss briefly a focus question. Volunteer-participants will be asked to play the parts of statisticians and, others, the questioning roles of (non-quantitative) subject-area faculty.

Conclusion

Our brief assessment socio-drama demonstrates the benefits of synthesizing quantitative and non-quantitative epistemologies. Cooperative assessment groups mix two academic cultures that would, we believe, mutually benefit from prolonged conversation.

More than forty years ago, Charles Percy Snow's Rede Lecture highlighted a comparable cultural divide: "I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into…[l]iterary intellectuals at one pole…[and] at the other scientists" (1959, p. 4). Snow continued, "polarisation [sic] is sheer loss to us all" (1959, p. 12).

Snow is still correct, then and now. Applying contrasting academic epistemologies to program assessment energizes planning, protocol development, and, eventually, data interpretation. Once motivated, program assessment plans and data quality develop, and annual program assessment results will apply more productively to program decision making. Of course, all academics value program assessment commitments when results are important, practical, and representative.

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Instructional Support Units: The Final Frontier...The Voyages of a Two-Year Community College in Institutional Effectiveness

David C. Leake
Sharon A. R. Kristovich

"Pre-Flight"...Background

In 1991, Parkland College revised its mission and purposes statement to incorporate the construction of an institutional effectiveness model. In the next several years, the model was developed, illustrating the links between the college's *mission and purposes* and the components of an assessment plan. This model is comprised of two processes, *academic assessment,* which focuses on assessing student academic achievement, and *institutional effectiveness,* which evaluates the instructional support units. By 1995, the college had embarked on an unprecedented journey ("to boldly go where no one has gone before") by initiating a continuous improvement process evaluating the "new life and civilizations" of instructional support units, the purpose of which was to document how instructional support services contribute to student learning and demonstrate the college's commitment to educational excellence.

The institutional effectiveness committee ("mission control") consists of the chair ("flight director"), who is a faculty member jointly selected by the college president and the faculty senate (PCA) president; the director of institutional research and evaluation, who is an ex-officio nonvoting member; the executive director of campus technologies; the associate vice president for student services; and four PCA members elected at-large, of whom two are faculty members. The chair coordinates the assessment process and meets with the executive vice president who administers institutional support for the support unit assessment and coordinates the linkage of this process with institutional planning and budgeting. One member of the committee is assigned to every unit as contact person, and he or she is responsible for explaining the process of evaluation and the use of the forms, and is available for questions that may arise during the evaluation cycle. The contact person also collects annual reports from assigned units and provides guidance as needed in their preparation. Every instructional support unit fully participates in the development and implementation of institutional effectiveness assessment within its own unit and provides assistance in the preparation of the committee annual report.

Four areas were selected for evaluation for the maiden voyage in FY 1996: the bookstore, career planning and employment services, the Staerkel Planetarium, and college/community relations. More units have been added annually, with some of the more recent units added to the evaluation process being college for kids, disability services, and office of women's programs and services, followed by the academic development center, adult degree completion center, art gallery, student services, business development center, dual credit/area learning center, Parkland Theater, and PCA (the faculty senate). As of November 2001, forty-three Parkland instructional support areas are evaluating their effectiveness and identifying needed improvements. The institutional effectiveness committee provides an annual progress report to the faculty senate in the spring.

Another responsibility of the committee is to provide indicators for the college to use in assessment and planning efforts. In 1996, the institutional effectiveness committee consulted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to adopt a set of *performance indicators.* The Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation and the Office of College Development compile and maintain these indicators. This document, published in even-numbered fiscal years (beginning in FY 2000), serves as a "control panel" for committee members and the college to monitor progress at Parkland. The report contains more than fifteen student, seven staff, and eight financial indicators, and is used by administrators, department chairs, and the college planning committee in the strategic planning process.

"All Systems Are Go!"...The Process

The purpose of the institutional effectiveness process is to provide a measure of how well Parkland's instructional support units are achieving their stated goals and to document how they contribute to the college's mission and commitment to excellence. The Parkland model is based on the institutional effectiveness assessment format developed by James Nichols of Mississippi State University and Harriet Calhoun of Jefferson State Community College. Instructional support units are reviewed in a cycle that involves evaluating the goals of the unit with respect to the college's *mission and purposes* statement, defining objectives, evaluating data, and applying the results of the evaluation to improve the service quality of the unit and support educational improvement. Figure 1 illustrates the process. Each unit develops its own mission statement, defines measurable goals, gathers data, evaluates outcomes, and uses the results for continuous improvement, with the support and guidance of the institutional effectiveness committee. The unit can then use the results of this process to plot a course to the college's institutional planning process, allowing for a data-driven commitment of resources.

Presently, there are forty-three instructional support units involved in the assessment cycle. A current list of these support units may be found at http://www.parkland.cc.il.us/ie/units.html. Eleven of these units have completed one cycle, three have completed two cycles, and two have completed three cycles of the process. Among those forty-three units is the college senate, the Parkland College Association, which just began its first cycle; and the means of assessment used are still under discussion.

There is evidence that instructional support units at Parkland are engaged in this institutional effectiveness process and understand the benefits they can get out of it. Every service unit completes an assessment record form with its objectives, assessments, and analyses. An analysis of these reports shows that many units are regularly surveying their constituents to make sure that they are meeting their objectives. For instance, from a point-of-contact survey conducted by the assessment center, it was found that examinees thought the printer in the testing room was distracting. In response to the survey feedback, the office space was rearranged, and the printer was moved out of the testing room. Also, the bookstore has responded to several faculty requests by increasing the number of cash registers from three to six and staggering the register lines to improve access.

Throughout the process, support units have access to the resources of the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation to aid them in their evaluation initiatives. The office provides support in several ways. It works with units to help them define measurable goals, assists in data collection efforts, and assists with outcome evaluation. Whenever possible, data collection efforts are coordinated to reduce the number of surveys students and staff are subjected to. Currently, there are three college-wide surveys administered: student satisfaction survey, student climate survey, and faculty/staff/administrator climate survey. These surveys are designed to collect importance and satisfaction data from representative samples of students and staff on education, services, and campus environment. At present, there are seventeen support units using the data from these campus-wide surveys. The office also furnishes research methods support, advising units on ways to collect data, constructing surveys, and providing data entry and analysis.

"The Eagle Has Landed!"...Successful Missions

One of the instructional support units at Parkland College that has completed multiple evaluation cycles is the William M. Staerkel Planetarium. Some of the actions taken at the planetarium as a result of the institutional effectiveness assessment program allow the staff to maintain the goal of contributing to the Parkland College community and the district at large:

- to increase their advertising budget outlined in their operational plan that has increased attendance by schoolchildren (19 percent), public schools (20 percent), and light shows (51 percent) in FY 1999–2000;
- to devise a donor brochure to reflect the commitment by individuals and businesses to the planetarium;
- to implement a way in which the planetarium can reach the public using nontraditional advertising. Future goals include the completion of a funded comprehensive survey and the acquisition of two corporate sponsors;

- to add a laptop computer so that instructors can more easily use the space for instruction;
- to develop and implement a survey of Parkland faculty who use the planetarium in their instruction to maximize service to Parkland students and to streamline the time-reservation process; and
- to develop and implement an equipment maintenance plan to prolong the life of aging equipment.

The first action demonstrates how the results of these analyses can be used in operational planning. Here, the planetarium staff, based on institutional effectiveness results, made a decision to increase the advertising budget. These resources were allocated through operational planning.

Another example is the bookstore. In order to support its mission of providing helpful assistance to students, faculty, and staff in procurement of materials and resources necessary to achieve their educational goals, the bookstore defined several objectives. For instance, the evaluation of the new point-of-sale computer system indicated that student waiting time was reduced from forty-five to sixty minutes at the busiest point of the first day in 1999–2000 to fifteen to twenty minutes in fall 2001. Also, based on timed register receipts, the rate of handling students increased from 1 student per minute in the 1999–2000 fall rush period to 3.1 students per minute in the 2000–2001 fall rush period. The time to take inventory was reduced from 400 hours with a team of ten in 1998–1999 to 80 hours with a team of five in 2000–2001. The results of the computer system will continue to be monitored to increase the rate of handling students, and therefore further reduce the student waiting time, and to become more efficient in using time and human resources.

A final example of a successful assessment mission is in the physical plant-custodial/grounds area. The evaluation process in this unit is still in the first cycle, but the staff have already made suggestions to improve service based on the analysis of data collected. Some of the improvements include:

- Developing a custodial log and a training schedule in order to improve training for new and current staff.
- Implementing a plan so that 100 percent of the staff are certified pesticide applicators.
- Assessing custodial and groundskeeper functions separately.

"One Small Step"... Lessons Learned

As with any new process, adjustments have been made to improve quality. One lesson learned was with the duration of the assessment cycle. The assessment cycle has been shortened from three years to eighteen to twenty-four months, with each area providing an annual progress report. Some of our groups operate on the academic calendar, while others use the fiscal calendar. Several changes have also been implemented in the format of the forms used and the control of the process. For instance, a standard assessment planning timeline has been adopted so that units can keep records of the stage they are at in the process. A very important improvement that facilitates the reporting system is the change of the assessment record forms from a horizontal to a vertical format. The new format is welcomed and promises to reduce time spent in completing the reports. Examples of both forms, the assessment planning timeline and the assessment record, as well as examples of the annual report form that instructional support units submit at the end of the academic year, are available at the institutional effectiveness section of Parkland's Web page (http://www.parkland.cc.il.us/ie).

Another small step taken relates to the realization that early assessment plans lacked criteria for success. Benchmarks must be instituted to know if you have reached the intended level of effectiveness. Units are now required to objectify goals and indicate success criteria, and the new version of the assessment record contains an entry for success criteria. In many cases, the first assessment cycle is used to determine these baselines.

A third issue facing the committee is the addition of new support services offered to satisfy educational, cultural, and training needs of the college. Organizational changes have made the process difficult to implement. Nine new units were added in the last six months. Some units were combined; others were split. On several occasions, support units had to start their process over due to this restructuring. In other cases, a new director has been hired who brings with him/her a new set of goals. It is important to note that the faculty, staff, and administrators who are working in the units drive Parkland College's institutional effectiveness process. A unit must have ownership of the plan in order for the assessment, analysis, and program alterations to be genuine.

A final issue is that a stronger link needs to be made between the results of the assessment process and operational planning. Ideally, some of the assessment results can be used to request funds through the annual operational planning process. However, few seem to use the process. A teaching model of the college planning process is currently in development to educate staff on the role of institutional effectiveness in planning and budgeting.

"One Giant Leap"... A Look to the Future

The assessment process itself is dynamic. As we move into 2002, there will undoubtedly be more adjustments as we move forward. This is the nature of the business. This year, the committee will tackle the Parkland College faculty senate, whose role on campus is to provide advice, counsel, and assistance to the president and to the board of trustees in order to promote and to develop the goals and philosophy of Parkland College. The institutional effectiveness committee will serve as advisors and coordinators in this process. Currently, the committee is examining data and determining the areas to be evaluated. Focus groups using an external moderator will be conducted using senate members and constituent groups.

The committee is also preparing for another mission–evaluating the operational planning process. Until now, the process has been evaluated informally by making adjustments based on lessons learned. One of the charges to the institutional effectiveness committee is to assess the college's operational planning process. At present, the committee is researching evaluation models and determining a course of action.

A special thanks is given to the Chapter 16 committee of our self-study, chaired by Maria Zepeda, who provided information for this paper.

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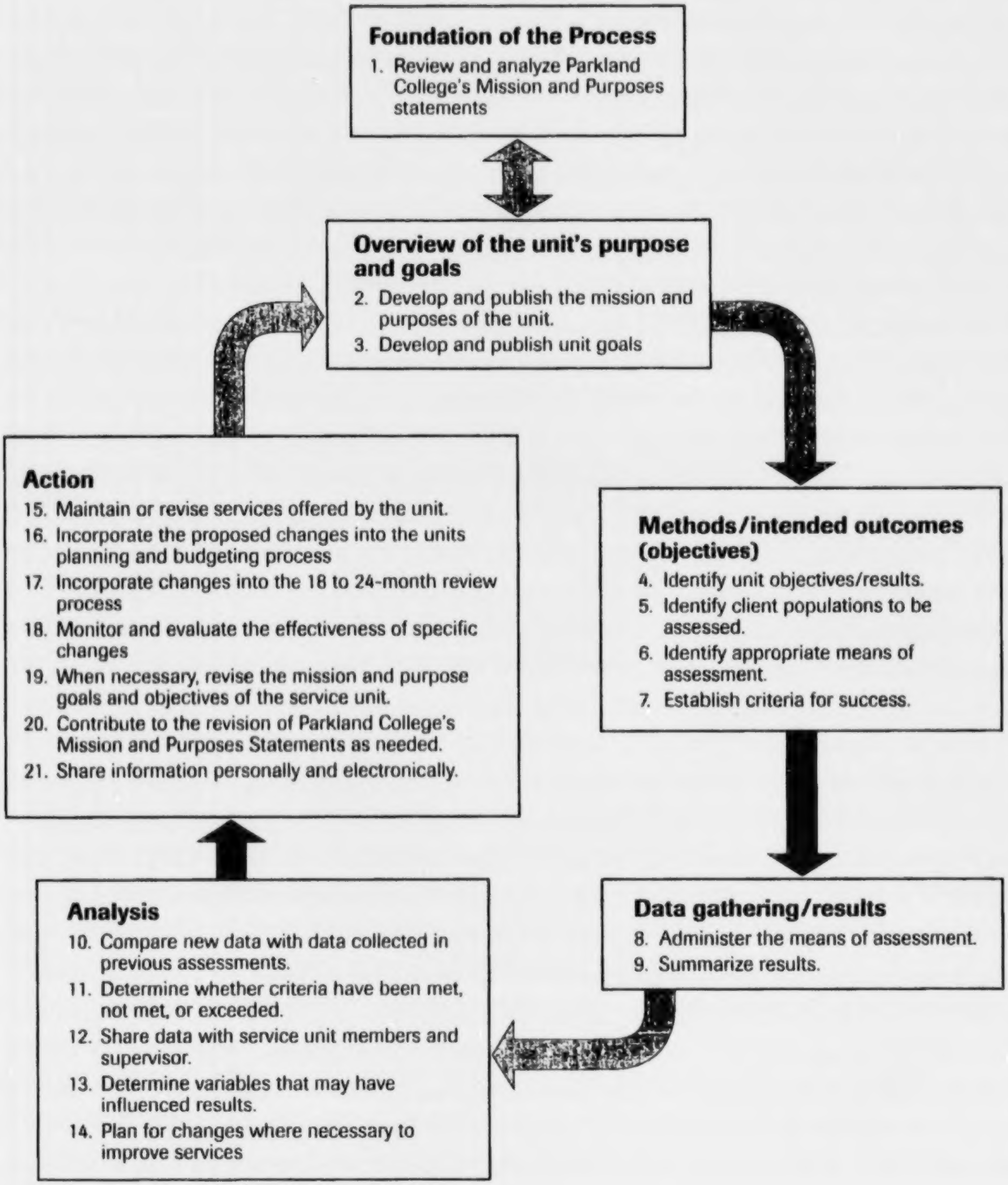
Appendix

Instructional Support Units: The Final Frontier… The Voyages of a Two-Year Community College in Institutional Effectiveness

Figure 1. Institutional Effective Process



Foundation of the Process

1. Review and analyze Parkland College's Mission and Purposes statements

Overview of the unit's purpose and goals

2. Develop and publish the mission and purposes of the unit.
3. Develop and publish unit goals

Methods/intended outcomes (objectives)

4. Identify unit objectives/results.
5. Identify client populations to be assessed.
6. Identify appropriate means of assessment.
7. Establish criteria for success.

Data gathering/results

8. Administer the means of assessment.
9. Summarize results.

Analysis

10. Compare new data with data collected in previous assessments.
11. Determine whether criteria have been met, not met, or exceeded.
12. Share data with service unit members and supervisor.
13. Determine variables that may have influenced results.
14. Plan for changes where necessary to improve services

Action

15. Maintain or revise services offered by the unit.
16. Incorporate the proposed changes into the units planning and budgeting process
17. Incorporate changes into the 18 to 24-month review process
18. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific changes
19. When necessary, revise the mission and purpose goals and objectives of the service unit.
20. Contribute to the revision of Parkland College's Mission and Purposes Statements as needed.
21. Share information personally and electronically.

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Designing, Implementing, and Maintaining a Program Assessment Plan in an Allied Health Professions Program

David J. Diers
Ann Vendrely

Introduction

Program assessment is a continuous and evolving process that can take many forms. The assessment process should be individualized to meet the needs of the program in question. Properly done, a comprehensive program assessment plan requires a great deal of planning and preparation. The process should begin and end with ownership by the core faculty.

There are many different models of assessment described in the literature, among these are objectives-oriented, management-oriented, expertise-oriented and participant-oriented. The faculty need to decide which of these will accomplish the assessment in the most effective manner for the program. These models can be followed exactly or can be combined to meet the needs of the program.

The objectives-oriented method of program evaluation is probably the most commonly used. It involves the designation of well-written programmatic goals or objectives followed by collection of data to measure the outcomes. Program changes are based on the match between the measured outcomes and the original goals. The benefits of this approach are the simplicity of the design and quantitative approach to measurement. These two benefits can also be considered the limitations of the approach, since the objectives-oriented method leaves little room for incidental or qualitative findings and limits outcomes to those things that can be measured clearly (Worthen et al. 1997).

The management-oriented approach is frequently used to assess a developing program. This method uses a decision-oriented evaluation structured to help administrators make good decisions. Stufflebeam (1985, cited in Worthen et al. 1997) organized a framework that isolates "context evaluation" to serve planning decisions, "input evaluation" to serve structuring decisions, "process evaluation" to serve implementing decisions, and "product evaluation" to serve recycling decisions. These can be used independently or incorporated into a comprehensive system.

An expertise-oriented approach is most commonly used by accreditation agencies. In this approach, outside evaluators who are designated as experts review and judge the value of a program. Usually, a set of standards is applied to the program, resulting in broad coverage based on human judgment. Limitations of this approach include the cost of hiring appropriate experts and the possibility that creativity and/or innovation may be suppressed.

A fourth approach is oriented to the participants of the program. This method relies on qualitative measures to understand the complexities and context of a program. It may involve interviews and surveys of all the stakeholders in the program. The benefits of this approach may be considered limitations by others. Benefits include the use of inductive reasoning, the use of a wide variety of information, and the emphasis on understanding. Limitations include the nondirective nature of the process, the possibility for large time commitments and costs, and a potential failure to reach closure on the process.

These four models are just a sampling of the possible frameworks that can be used to organize program assessment. Program assessment should focus on the program as a whole and not be confused with individual student assessment. Student assessment is a portion of program assessment, but additional considerations, such as outside standards set by the sponsoring institution or specialized accreditation, may also affect the assessment plan. After the approach for program assessment is selected, it is time to design a specific plan for the program.

Design

The focus of the rest of this paper will be on the application of the objectives-oriented approach to a physical therapy program. This physical therapy program started in 1996 and has since grown and progressed through both institutional and specialized accreditation processes. The objectives-oriented approach has been modified to meet the needs of the program.

The importance of faculty involvement in the design of the assessment plan cannot be overstated. It is a crucial element for gathering information that will be meaningful and useful for continued program improvement. Faculty may be unaccustomed to the amount of teamwork and the large time commitment necessary for designing and implementing a successful assessment program (Peitus and Smith 1991). We recommend setting aside a significant amount of time for staff development as the process is begun. After the assessment plan is designed, faculty time must continue to be allocated to the project for it to be successful. We have found that two day faculty retreats held off-campus in the spring and fall are necessary to maintain the assessment process and plan for program enhancements. The faculty retreats allow time for the group to focus on curricular and assessment issues. Each retreat is held between teaching terms to allow faculty time to focus on issues that transcend individual courses. Technological and secretarial help is used during the retreats to document discussion and decision making.

The physical therapy program has employed a six-step arrangement to design, implement, and maintain the program assessment plan. The first four steps focus on design issues, while the fifth and sixth steps correspond to implementation and maintenance. The plan utilizes the objectives-based approach espoused by Tyler (1949), with a few modifications based on our own experience. The program endeavors to include the program's stakeholders throughout the process by contributing or collecting data, analyzing results, and planning improvements with the core program faculty taking the lead role. The stakeholders include adjunct faculty, students, clinical faculty, alumni, employers, and others.

The six steps are as follows:

1. Establish broad goals or objectives.
2. Define objectives in measurable terms.
3. Find situations in which achievement can be shown.
4. Select measurement techniques.
5. Collect performance data.
6. Compare performance data to the behaviorally stated objectives. (Worthen et al. 1997)

The process of designing the assessment plan begins with defining the program's mission, philosophy, program goals, and curricular objectives. Tyler (1949) advocates starting with general objectives that are very inclusive. These objectives should identify what the program hopes to achieve and are often stated in terms of the expectations of the graduate. This time-consuming process helps the faculty determine what makes the program special and where their teaching efforts will be focused.

The second step involves a closer look at the program goals or objectives. The objectives must be stated in measurable terms in preparation for implementation. This may involve justifying the need for each objective and weighing one objective's merit against the merit of a similar objective. There may also be questions of feasibility and cost involved at this point.

The third step in the process is to review the learning experiences that are available to students in the program and identify the situations in which achievement of the objectives can be demonstrated. Some objectives will be found to permeate the whole curriculum, appearing in a variety of courses. Other objectives will be most apparent in final or capstone courses. Students should have multiple opportunities to practice and achieve the stated objectives.

The fourth and final step in designing the assessment plan can be one of the most difficult. The appropriate measurement techniques must be selected or developed. It is important to find measures that closely match the stated objectives. Further, it is helpful to aim to triangulate the data from different sources, including qualitative and quantitative measures (Webb 1996). Existing activities or tests can be used, or new measures may need to be developed. The faculty should try to balance the use of both quantitative measures such as tests and qualitative items such as surveys or focus group interviews. The measurement tools should be carefully matched to the program objectives.

The fifth and sixth steps in the assessment plan will be discussed as part of the implementation, since they include collecting data and using it to make decisions about program improvements. The six steps are sequential, and each decision affects the ones that follow it, which guides the program faculty to reflect and improve at each step.

Implementation

The key to the implementation of the program assessment process is to have all data collection clearly assigned to responsible faculty members, with one person in charge of assimilating all of the data. This allows everyone to be involved, responsible, and accountable for program assessment while having it organized so that everything is done in a timely, systematic manner. Much of the data collection occurs within the normal operation of the program. One example is admissions data collected by the admission chairperson. After the data are assimilated, the sixth step occurs when the core faculty examine the data and decide if the results meet the objectives determined during the design of the program assessment plan. Stakeholder involvement is sought at this stage to review the data and respond to proposed program improvements.

Maintenance

The cycle of six steps repeats each year with more emphasis on the last two steps as the assessment program becomes established. To avoid becoming stagnant and stuck in a rut, the stakeholders must periodically review the first four steps for possible enhancements. The program faculty must have a vision for the future and understand that this assessment process is the way to work toward achieving it. This involvement can result in faculty focusing on improving student learning (Beery and Fallon 2001).

Conclusions

After providing an overview of four approaches to program evaluation, we have shared our application of the objectives-oriented approach for a physical therapy program. We have modified the approach by adding elements of the participant-oriented approach by integrating feedback from stakeholders such as students, advisory board members, clinical faculty, and employers throughout the process. We have a team-oriented faculty that has worked together over many long hours to design, implement, and maintain this assessment program. It has resulted in a number of improvements for the program in an atmosphere of excellence.

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Pre-Post Assessment in the Performing Arts

Neil Pagano
Richard Woodbury
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Assessing student achievement in performing arts programs presents a number of challenges. First of all, the judgments we make are inherently subjective given the subjective nature of the performing arts. In addition, the performances we are attempting to assess are, quite literally in the case of dance students, moving targets. Finally, closing the feedback loop can be difficult if there is little agreement concerning assessment criteria and if there is the steadfast belief that one cannot remove the subjectivity associated with assessment. As daunting as these challenges are, the dance department at Columbia College Chicago has addressed them and has crafted an approach to assessment that accomplishes the two major purposes of academic assessment: to affirm student achievement and to make informed curricular decisions.

Columbia College Chicago is a private arts and communications college in Chicago's South Loop. Total undergraduate student population is approximately 8,500. The dance department offers both a BFA and BA in dance. One of the most important aspects of the dance program is that it, like the college, is an open admissions institution, so admission to the dance program is based on student desire and not on student ability.

When the movement to develop a systematic approach to assessment came to the college in the mid-1990s, one of the first steps the dance department took was to develop objectives for the BA program (the BFA was introduced in 2001). The program objectives were as follows:

Graduates of the Dance Program at Columbia College will:

1. Possess a coordinated, conditioned, articulate and aligned instrument (their body, mind, spirit) that is responsive to direction, accurate in execution, and capable of integrated expressive performance.
2. Be able to choreograph dances that display originality in movement invention and the application of compositional principles.
3. Understand the fundamental elements, theories and aesthetics of contemporary modern dance within the context of a diverse world of dance practices, and informed by historical/cultural perspectives and dance's relationships to other fields.
4. Demonstrate the attitudinal and behavioral attributes of effective participation in dance including: openness to new experiences and challenges, willingness to take risks, ability to work collaboratively, facility in creative problem solving, self-discipline, and self-directed curiosity.

In order to systematically assess many aspects of these objectives, Primary Trait Analysis (PTA) rubrics were developed. PTA (Walvoord and Anderson 1998) is widely accepted assessment approach in which student work is evaluated using an agreed-upon rubric that contains criteria directly related to an assignment, project, or performance. In the case of dance students, these criteria had already been articulated in many of the performing areas, as they were the criteria used to place and pass students in the different course levels.

During the 1998–1999 academic year, the department was presented with an excellent opportunity for assessing program change; contact hours for the modern dance technique courses increased three-fold. Under the former curriculum, one credit-hour of dance technique equated to one contact hour in the studio. Under the revised curriculum, one credit-hour now equaled three contact hours in the studio.

In addition, even though there is a series of three modern dance technique courses (I, II, and III), the only technique requirement under the former curriculum was that students complete seven hours in Technique III. The new curriculum lengthened out this technique requirement, mandating that all students go through the three-course series and eventually complete twenty-four hours. In short, the contact hours increased and, at the same time, the required sequence was lengthened for virtually every student.

During the 1998–1999 academic year, class performances from students in Modern Technique II were video-taped. One taping occurred in the fall semester, and the second in the spring. (It should be noted that since students typically spend more than one semester in each of the technique courses, the composition of each of these classes was virtually the same.) A three-member faculty panel assessed student performances and found that students made substantial gains in each area.

Modern Dance Technique II **Body as Skilled Instrument**	**Fall 98 (n = 28)**	**Spring 99 (n = 25)**	**Gain**
Musculature	2.00	3.17	1.17
Alignment	2.17	3.00	0.83
Physical Isolations	1.83	2.83	1.00
Neuro muscular Coordination	1.83	3.00	1.17
Movement Memory	1.83	3.00	1.17
Ability to Pick-up New Material	1.67	3.00	1.33
Average Mean	**1.89**	**3.00**	**1.11**
Performance Qualities			
Concentration	2.50	3.00	0.50
Dynamic Phrasing	2.00	3.00	1.00
Musical Awareness	1.67	3.00	1.33
Rhythmic Accuracy	1.67	3.00	1.33
Spatial Intent	2.17	2.67	0.50
Focus	2.00	2.83	0.83
Overall Artistry	2.00	2.83	0.83
Average Mean	**2.00**	**2.90**	**0.90**

In terms of assessing what Astin (1993) refers to as "talent development," this assessment activity certainly suggests that the students grew as performing artists as a result of their experiences in Modern Dance II (in specific) and in the dance program (in general). In addition, this assessment gave the faculty the opportunity to reflect on the curricular changes regarding increased contact hours and lengthening the sequence. The entire process–the tapes, the panel review, and the subsequent discussions–prompted some profound comments on the performances of the students and how these reflect the curriculum, the program, and departmental pedagogy.

The faculty comments and conclusions on the results can be categorized into four areas: strengths, weaknesses, curricular implications, and pedagogical implications.

Student Strengths

The students showed marked improvement between semesters. They were much stronger, more conditioned, and more centered. They demonstrated better awareness of alignment primarily in standing/stationary work. They were much more accurate with spatial forms; they demonstrated patterns with more clarity. Their technical skills (jumping, turning, leaping) were good. Overall, they seemed cleaner, clearer, stronger, and more confident with movement material.

Student Weaknesses

Their weaknesses seemed to be in qualitative performance aspects. While they were clear with spatial forms, they lacked a sense of spatial intent. They lacked a three-dimensionality and sculptural sense of their body in space. They also were lacking in rhythmic work. While they were more "on the beat" by the second semester, they lacked phrasing.

They seemed to be dancing more robotically rather than dancing with musicality. They also lacked a sense of dynamic flow; they were weak in their understanding of weight, gravity, and flow. While these seem to be huge gaps, it is where they should be. Modern Technique III (the next course in the sequence) should be more weighted towards performance and qualitative work.

The panel noted that as the concentration and commitment of the students toward their learning has grown, there has been less questioning of teachers. They ask less about the "Whys" and "Hows" in class. The positive aspect of this is that the students are less disruptive in class. The students are serious and working hard, so there is less temptation to slow the class down with unnecessary questions. However, this can be a dangerous slope for the faculty as we emphasize more rigor and discipline in our program. We must keep rigor and curiosity in balance, so as to encourage healthy curiosity. Our recommendation is to encourage faculty to assign at least a day of non-moving classes, where the students and teachers can engage in discussions about training including subjects such as style, history, philosophy, and goal setting.

Curricular Implications

Being in class consistently has greatly enhanced their technical strengths and skills. The panel also felt that this evidence of solid student progress confirms the wisdom of the changes to the dance program's technique requirements. In discussion after the assessment session, the faculty panel noted that student strengths reflected the strengths of the particular faculty in those courses and that a conscious rotation of faculty assignments based on matching faculty strengths with observed student need would be advisable and possible. It was also noted that although students had made notable progress with physical skills, they were still lacking in refined/nuanced performance. It was noted that this was to be expected in Modern Technique II, and that performance skills above and beyond physical technique were developed at the Modern Technique III level.

Their concentration, alertness, and enthusiasm were significantly higher than they were three years ago. The students were thinking faster and knew that it was their job to do so. They were taking their learning more seriously. Two of panelists noted that our senior-level students have significantly higher skills than our alumni.

Pedagogical Implications

From teacher evaluations, we know that a lot of students were frustrated with the level of individual attention they were getting from teachers. Our classes are getting larger, and it is a reality. We suggest that we begin a campaign next year that teaches students how to take class constructively and get the most out of any correction from a teacher. In our fall meeting, we would like to stress the levels of "ownership" of taking class at each level. This should help some of the frustration and make our students better learners.

We also noted that there were a lot of attitude problems consistently in the *Modern II* level for many years. This level is a difficult one, somewhat close to adolescence. Often, students have a hard time valuing the "do it over and over and over again" methodology, and yet that is exactly what they need. It is a question that all of us struggle with, and some faculty workshops to talk about repetition versus new material in the struggle to gain technique might be worthwhile.

We noted that the strength of our technical program in the past has been the confidence we instill in students and the individuality of performance nuance of each dancer (they are not cookie cutters). As we begin to see more technical strength and clarity, it is important that we do not lose the aesthetic and performance qualities that we ultimately value as most important.

Our recommendation is to move technique teachers to different levels. Spring would be the ideal time to move the Modern Technique III teachers to Modern Technique I and II, and vice-versa. This would give everyone a change of teacher when they move to a new level and then a return to a previous teacher in spring. It would allow the strengths of our different faculty members to influence all the levels, creating more balance between technical skills and performance throughout students' tenure with us.

Effective assessment programs are faculty-driven, present critical and honest insights into student performance, suggest potentially effective ways to change the curriculum, and offer meaningful ways to evaluate the effects of any changes. The creativity and commitment of the faculty in the dance department at Columbia College Chicago have made assessment a worthwhile and valuable undertaking.

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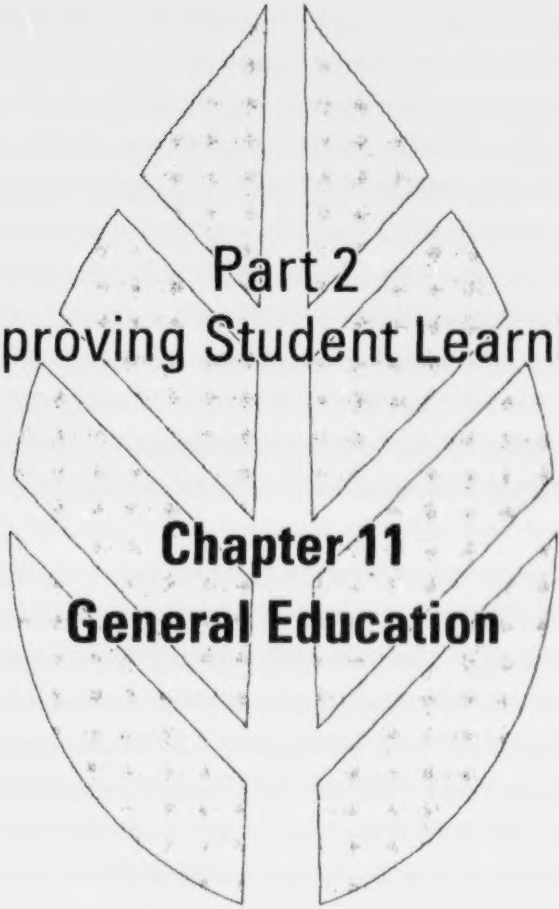

Part 2
Improving Student Learning

Chapter 11
General Education

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
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Curricular Renewal: The Role of General Education

Christine Frances Briggs

Course-embedded assessment has been the catalyst for curricular revision and renewal at Henry Ford Community College (HFCC) in disciplines as diverse as computer science, English, political science, and biology. Modifications range from an increase in writing across the curriculum to a degree requirement of computer literacy. Students have responded favorably to faculty efforts to make learning objectives more explicit; faculty have learned to value assessment, as underscored by our 2001 faculty survey on assessment.

HFCC General Education Outcomes

Although we use multiple instruments to measure student learning, we rely on course-embedded assessment to measure the success of students in satisfying our four general education outcomes:

1. Proficiency in reading and writing in standard English.
2. Computer literacy in the retrieval, analysis and evaluation, processing, and delivery of information in order to participate in a technologically oriented society.
3. Understanding of the foundations and operations of American social/political institutions and culture in the context of a diverse global community.
4. Critical thinking and problems solving skills in addressing a problem or situation described verbally, graphically, symbolically, or numerically.

Instead of simply measuring student performance near the point of graduation (where little can be done to address student deficiencies), we have made deep structural changes in the general education courses in which outcomes 1 and 3 are embedded. To address outcome 2, we created a new degree requirement of computer literacy and revised existing courses to meet the requirement. To meet outcome 4, each division/department must also demonstrate how the critical thinking competency is embedded in classes at the 100 level and above, with the exception of classes in which performance, rather than critical thinking, is the primary outcome.

To track our process in regard to general education assessment and to record answers to frequently asked questions, we created a procedural chart, which has grown from two to twenty pages. This document was developed by the Instructional Assessment Committee (IAC), which consists of fifteen faculty representatives and eight administrators, including both the career and academic vice presidents. The committee is co-chaired by an elected faculty member and the career education vice president. Each year, the IAC updates its procedures, submits them to faculty forums for review, and forwards the modified document to the college senate for approval. Although the senate approves procedural modifications, the college organization must approve policy changes.

Creation of a New Degree Requirement in Computer Literacy

The adoption of outcome 2 by the HFCC College Organization eventually led to the creation of a new degree requirement in basic computer literacy. After researching the practices of other colleges, we opted for a definition of general education computer literacy that incorporates many of the computer skills measured by exit assessment tools at other community colleges and entails some components of information literacy. Once we adopted basic computer literacy as a general education outcome, HFCC programs began to revise their courses to address this outcome. The degree requirement can be satisfied either by successful completion of a council-approved course in which the computer literacy outcomes are embedded or by passage of a computer literacy test.

Students can satisfy this requirement by taking one of the courses currently approved to meet this competency:

ACT 112	Computers in Architecture
AH 125	Surveys of Computerized Medical Information Systems
BCA 140	Microcomputer Applications for Business
CIS 100	Introduction to Information Technology
CIS 221	Instructional Technology for Elementary Educators
CIS 223	Instructional Technology for Secondary Educators
HCS 131	Computers and Health Care
TAE 715	Industrial Computer Exploration

Rationale for Course-Embedded Assessment

Why did we opt for course-embedded assessment? At HFCC, we initially located the assessment process within our general education requirements to ensure greater acceptance and more comprehensive reform of instruction. According to the article, "Assessment Instruments and Methods Available to Assess Student Learning," there are a number of advantages to using course-embedded assessment:

> First, student information gathered from embedded assessment draws on accumulated educational experiences and familiarity with specific areas or disciplines. Second, embedded assessment often does not require additional time for data collection, since instruments used to produce student-learning information can be derived from course assignments already planned as part of program requirements. Third, the presentation of feedback to faculty and students can occur very quickly creating a conducive environment for ongoing programmatic improvement. Finally, course-embedded assessment is part of the curricular structure and students have traditionally responded well to this method. (UW-Madison Office of the Provost. 1997)

The efficacy of course-embedded assessment is underscored by the prevalence of this method nationally. For his NCA presentation, "General Education, Assessment, and Accreditation: Do Faculty Perceive Improvement," Mark Nutter (2001) studied approximately 21,300 full-time faculty members at the community colleges accredited by the North Central Association. A sample of 369 faculty was systematically selected. Nearly half (44.3 percent) of the respondents reported that their colleges were relying solely on "course-based assessments to judge the effectiveness of general education programs" (p. 95). The study indicated that respondents using course-based methods were generally more satisfied with their general education programs than were those who reported using a commercially developed test (p. 95).

Once our college senate endorsed course-embedded assessment, we faced two challenges:

1. To promote faculty acceptance of assessment
2. To ensure that assessment would involve substantive improvements in student learning, not simply compliance with Higher Learning Commission requirements.

As Cecilia López and others have made abundantly clear, faculty resistance to assessment has been a major problem. This is not surprising. According to Marchese (2000), "When humans confront a 'threatening situation,' higher-order cortical functioning is supplanted by the more elemental limbic…the emotions come to rule." How to make assessment less threatening is a subject that has received much coverage in the last decade. Three factors have worked at HFCC. The entire process is faculty driven; the evaluation provided by the assessment process is independent of the student grade for the course; and faculty are neither penalized nor criticized for poor student performance in the initial rounds of assessment.

Benefits of Outcome 1 Assessment: More Uniform Approach to English Curriculum

The faculty of the English Division designated a major course project, the documented report, as the measure of writing proficiency in our second-semester composition class, English 135. After visiting the Chicago Rubric Bank and the California Achievement Web site, English curriculum committees designed rubrics for the major paper in English 135. The process itself led to improvement in instruction as English teachers debated the merit of each word selected for the rubric and then participated in analytical grading of sample papers. One teacher's comment is representative of the standard reaction to analytical grading: "The group grading process motivated me to reevaluate my grading standards, to look more critically at how I comment on papers." Another participant cited his "increased use of individualized assessment, based on classroom-community based standards, in a constructivist learning setting developed jointly by instructors and learners." The students also contributed to and benefited from this process. Eighty-nine percent of student respondents recommended that the rubric be distributed to future English classes.

In May 2001, assignments were evaluated by review panels consisting of English faculty, HFCC faculty from other disciplines, and full-time English faculty from the colleges to which we transfer our students—University of Michigan-Dearborn and Wayne State University. The results were startling and informative: the majority of English 135 teachers had not assigned a report. Without the assessment process, the English division would never have discerned that instructors were baffled by the requirement of a technical report. Within six months of this discovery, instructional sessions on the technical report were provided to both adjunct and full-time teachers; course materials were developed for distribution; and all teachers now require a feasibility or informational report. Without assessment, we would never have discovered this weakness in our writing program.

Benefit of Outcome 3: Writing Across the Curriculum

Assessment has also promoted writing across the curriculum. Since all HFCC students are required to complete Political Science 131 or Social Science 131, outcome 3, "Understanding of the foundations and operations of American social/political institutions and culture in the context of a diverse global community," was embedded within those classes. Prior to the identification of outcome 3, multiple-choice exams were primarily used to measure student achievement. The social science division included a writing assignment *to measure student understanding of "American social/political institutions and culture in the context of a diverse global community."* The division chose not to mandate a common assignment but identified a common core of five comparable assignments from which an instructor could select. The written artifact was assigned a weight of 15 percent to 25 percent of the final grade. Each Political Science 131 and Social Science 131 instructor selected one assignment from the following:

1. A journal project summarizing and analyzing articles from *The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, Washington Post, Economist,* and similar sources.
2. A research paper including sources. Students would save their working notes.
3. An analysis of a relevant Web site with political content.
4. A critical review of a journal article from a professional periodical in which the student summarizes the article, relates the topic to class materials, and properly cites the source.
5. A journal based upon fieldwork or a service-learning project.

Although the inclusion of written assignment dramatically increased the workload for each instructor, the division opted for writing as a way to promote "deep learning." According to recent scholarship, 90 percent of student learning is of the surface variety. Australian scholar Paul Ramsden (1992) has been able to identify characteristics of courses in which students take a surface approach to learning:

> The courses obsess over coverage; the huge amount of material they cram in precludes an opportunity to pursue topics in depth; students have little choice about what and how to study... Students are more likely to engage in active forms of learning when they believe that their own effort, rather than external factors beyond their control, determines success.

Prior to the advent of assessment, Political Science 131 and Social Science 131 seemed more likely to promote surface learning. These survey classes covered a "huge amount of material" and tested that student knowledge primarily by multiple-choice exams. The inclusion of a writing assignment provided an opportunity for students to select their own subject and to control their own success. In *Making the Most of College*, Richard Light presents a compelling argument for the impact of written assignments on a student's self-reported level of engagement.

> The relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students' level of engagement—whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students' level of interest in it—is stronger than the relationship between students' engagement and any other course characteristic. It is stronger than the relation between students' engagement and their impressions of their professor. It is far stronger than the relationship between level of engagement and why a student takes a course (required versus elective; major field versus not in the major field). ... Students learn most effectively when writing instruction is organized around a substantive discipline (2000, 35).

During the winter term, 1,007 students enrolled in forty-one sections of political science. From this population, 104 students representing thirty-eight sections were randomly selected for inclusion in this study. Their assignments were then evaluated by a peer review team comprised of discipline experts from our four-year transfer institutions, HFCC content specialists, English teachers, and members of other disciplines. The team evaluated student work according to the rubric or primary trait analysis designed by the division and provided to the student. After careful deliberation, the department identified four important skills that the assignment should foster and that the rubric should measure: summary, analysis, documentation, and writing.

To foster inter-reader reliability, we based our training on the recommendations of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). Our interim coordinator for assessment conducted a four-hour training session in fall 2000. After the training session, three groups were formed from the ten participants in this pilot, and each group reviewed thirty-four or thirty-five artifacts.

Ninety-five percent of the students who were judged as successful on the assessment project did earn a C or above in the class. Unfortunately, only 62 percent of the subjects scored satisfactorily on the assessment. When we consider those students who were judged as successful in the overall evaluation (N = 62), the most successful group were those who completed the journal assignment that involved summary and analysis of newspaper articles.

Given that no prerequisites exist for these general education classes, faculty had anticipated that initial student achievement might be low. Instructors were motivated, not threatened by this result. Prior to adopting a prerequisite, which would substantially reduce enrollment in these classes, faculty decided to explore how assignment modification might lead to increased student success. Instead of requiring research papers that require a complex matrix of skills, instructors have narrowed the array of assignments to two, both of which focus on summary and analysis, the skills for which students showed some aptitude in the initial study. Students were clearly handicapped by their unfamiliarity with the international scene. How could a student possibly summarize an article on the political importance of Kashmir with no conceptual understanding of the conflict between Pakistan and India?

To provide a context for understanding, students are now asked to summarize and analyze five articles on (1) a country; (2) a region (e.g., Latin America or the Pacific Rim); or (3) a social or policy issue with global implications (e.g., immigration policy, global warming, child labor). Prior to beginning the assignment, students complete a brief background sheet on the country, region, or issue. An informational packet is distributed to students that includes tips on summary, analysis, and research; student models; a checklist or primary trait analysis (rubric); and documentation guidelines. All students receive constructive feedback on their initial summary. To make the assignment more relevant for students and promote interdisciplinary cooperation, some instructors have asked other disciplines to identify relevant themes with global implications (e.g., hospitality–genetically engineered food, criminal justice–international approaches to aviation safety). Others have directed students to work collaboratively, with each group researching one global theme such as bio-terrorism or biogenetic engineering.

To address writing and reading deficiencies, students are directed to the HFCC learning lab. Some social science instructors have even used these assignments to mandate completion of skills assignments to increase reading comprehension. To support the social science division, the English division now assigns analytical summaries in the first semester of freshman composition. According to *How People Learn*, "Knowledge that is taught in a variety of contexts is more likely to support flexible transfer than knowledge that is taught in a single context…When material is taught in multiple contexts, people are more likely to extract the relevant features of the concepts and develop a more flexible representation of knowledge that can be used more generally" (Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council 2000, 236).

In May 2002, we will revisit outcome 3. If student performance has not improved, we will seriously consider establishing a pre-requisite for the general education social science classes.

Outcome 4: Measurement of Critical Thinking in Biology

As part of our regular assessment plan, all HFCC courses numbered over 100 are required to embed critical thinking or problem solving. According to Jones et al. "critical thinking is defined in seven major categories: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, presenting arguments, reflection, and dispositions" (1995, 6). "Problem solving is defined as understanding the problem, being able to obtain background knowledge, generating possible solutions, identifying and evaluating constraints, choosing a solution, functioning with a problem-solving group, evaluating the process, and exhibiting problem-solving dispositions." (1995, 9). However, there is clearly considerable overlap in critical thinking and problem solving.

Since critical thinking is often discipline-specific, HFCC has designed a process by which each discipline designs its own measure of critical thinking/problem solving based on the categories identified in the *NPEC Sourcebook on Assessment, Volume 1: Definitions and Assessment Methods for Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Writing* (U.S. Department of Education 2000). This allows for authentic assessment as each division identifies its own project in relation to critical thinking and selects a significant assignment that will help develop as well as measure the critical thinking of students.

To design the Biology 131 critical thinking assessment project, the full time Biology faculty who teach Bio 131 and the HFCC coordinator of critical thinking assessment selected a common assignment, an experiment called "photosynthesis." After much deliberation, the faculty revised the materials associated with the photosynthesis experiment based on past experiences with students who had completed it over the last five years. The faculty then developed a rubric to identify six skills students use while writing the analysis of the lab experiment: (1) accurate recording of observations, (2) relating new observations to other known facts, (3) phrasing hypothesis appropriate to the question, (4) correctly identifying cause and effect for any observed changes, (5) comparing control and variable, and (6) relating hypothesis and supporting evidence. For its pilot, the team's initial objective was that 70 percent of the students would achieve a 3 or higher as a composite average.

For the large-scale assessment in the fall 2001, faculty collected two randomly chosen papers from each of twenty-five lab sections, including all day and night classes as well as all full- and part-time instructors. The review team consisted of all five Biology 131 full time instructors, the coordinator of critical thinking assessment, and one external expert, a chemistry professor from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Since this experiment involved biochemistry and acid-base chemistry, his input was very helpful. Individual committee members read and scored each paper on a scale from 1 to 5 and then met together to reach agreement on scoring. The benefit to the team reading was that numerous times a single reader missed something that a student wrote or omitted, misintrepreted what the student wrote, or differed slightly in the intepretation of the rubric.

After tabulating the score for each skill, the faculty discovered that the 68.6 percent of the students achieved a 3 or higher on the experiment. Two areas of difficulty were identified, one of which was easily corrected. Students scored only a 34 percent in identifying cause-and-effect relationships, primarily because the questions were misleading. As one instructor commented, "Without the review sessions, I could have been grading for 20 years without realizing that the question needed rewording." Students had the greatest difficulty with the synthesis required in relating the comparison between control and variable. When asked to compose a paragraph, they could only provide a partial answer and could not see the big picture. The process of assessment allowed faculty to revise the lab assignment and to identify students' most significant challenge in relation to critical thinking. As a result of assessment, faculty also identified certain critical thinking concepts that are universal although they are measured in distinct ways in each discipline.

Faculty Support for Assessment: Survey Response

Have we succeeded in our efforts? Our faculty survey on assessment distributed in August 2001 argues for our success. The survey was distributed at the College Organization meeting, a bi-annual meeting that all faculty are required to attend. Instructors were asked to return the survey within the next two weeks. Ninety-five of 204 surveys were returned, for a 47 percent completion rate. What percentage of the respondents indicated that they were willing "to participate in the effort to assess and improve student learning at HFCC" and agreed that "good assessment measures can give instructors useful information to help improve their teaching"? We were pleasantly surprised by a 97 percent affirmation. Ninety-nine percent of the faculty also agreed that it was very true or mostly true that "all students who pass a course should meet certain common learning objectives, no matter who teaches it." More than forty-one written responses were obtained in response to the inquiry: "Describe any changes in your teaching methods you have made as a result of using assessment methods to measure student learning."

Assessment is indeed time consuming and labor intensive, but it can lead to significant curricular reform as divisions work together in a manner that has not happened before at HFCC. Because of assessment, HFCC has a computer literacy requirement, writing across the curriculum, more uniform course content, and an active movement to articulate and promote critical thinking.

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Institutional Integrity and the Assessment of Student Learning: Bloom's Taxonomy

John A. Halpin

For an institution to be true to its core values, it is vital that its general education program be designed to advance its mission. Eureka College is now engaged in a comprehensive endeavor to strengthen this important aspect of institutional integrity. Specifically, we are in the third year of a college-wide reform of our general education program, the first such effort in almost three decades. The outcome of our work to date is a curriculum framework that we believe effectively captures our school's learning identity and will better prepare our graduates for the professional and civic challenges they will face in the twenty-first century.

A number of reform tasks remain to be completed, most notably the development of a plan to assess student learning under the new curriculum. In the present paper, a case is made that any such assessment plan should be guided by a conceptual model of how cognitive abilities change as a result of educational experiences. It is recommended, using the goals of our psychology program as an illustration, that Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom et al. 1956) be adapted to that purpose.

Curricular Response to Disconnects

Approximately six years ago, in response to a growing concern that our curricular and co-curricular programs were not adequately informed by a shared institutional vision, Eureka College undertook an extensive reexamination of its educational purpose and promise. The outcome of this process was a new strategic plan, shaped by a similarly new mission statement that accentuated our commitment to learning, service, and leadership. As we investigated the implications of this new statement for college programs and practices, potential disconnects became evident in the area of general education. We were not satisfied, for example, with our answers to questions like: Does our curriculum stimulate the kind of knowledge integration that characterizes liberal arts learning? Are we producing graduates who have the skills and inclination to be servant leaders? Do our general education requirements represent a structured and coordinated means to meet the learning needs of our students?

At the direction of our chief academic officer, a curriculum reform steering committee was formed to investigate these and other questions pertaining to the mission centrality of our general education program. For two years the committee led a campus-wide effort to formulate a defensible alternative to the present curriculum. Early in the first year we worked to better articulate the college's learning identity, from which were developed new general education mission and goals statements that made more apparent the role of our program in promoting the overall Eureka College mission. We then oversaw a wide-ranging examination of our own assessment data, the best practices endorsed by other institutions, and curriculum trends reported in the higher education literature. Out of this process, a number of potential general education models emerged, and the committee spent the better part of the second year effecting a compromise among these models and securing community support for the result.

What we ultimately recommended, and what we are currently working to implement, is a general education program centered on a core, interdisciplinary, team-taught sequence of courses. Although this model represents a significant departure from what is currently in place, it is specifically designed to address the aforementioned disconnects between our mission and our curriculum. To that end, the model calls for courses that stimulate in students an awareness of, and appropriate responses to, connections: among the traditional liberal arts and sciences disciplines; between skills and real-world problems; among humans; and between humans and the environment. The model likewise affords a curricular answer, through targeted courses and experiences, to our mission's challenge to foster excellence in servant leadership.

Developmental Progression

Of the reform tasks that remain to be completed, perhaps the most important is to evaluate, through the extensive collection of assessment data, the extent to which the new model does indeed strengthen the mission support provided by our general education program. A helpful starting point for such an evaluation process is suggested by one of the key assumptions that underlies the curriculum framework we have developed.

It is assumed that general education is a four-year enterprise that involves the development of progressively more sophisticated knowledge bases, skills, and dispositions. We contend that the curricular facilitation of integrative learning and servant leadership must not be largely relegated to the first and second years and then effectively replaced by discipline-specific training in the third and fourth years. To the extent that our general education program is vital for advancing the college's mission, it must engage and challenge students each year they are enrolled and it must be driven by increasingly higher expectations.

The implication of this position is that an effective assessment plan for our general education program should be grounded in a developmental account of learning, service, and leadership that outlines the growth we expect to witness in our students across their years in college. Such an account would provide conceptual coherence to our curricular requirements, enable us to sequence our general education courses in meaningful ways, and serve as a guide for encouraging accountability in our students for their own intellectual growth. It would, moreover, assist us in identifying and coordinating performance objectives for assessment purposes.

Bloom's Taxonomy

A strong candidate for a developmental account that might achieve these ends is Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, which is currently being used in our psychology department to structure its assessment efforts. Following our most recent accreditation visit by the North Central Association, our chief academic officer charged the faculty with developing goal-based assessment plans for each major. I articulated thirty goals for the psychology major that seemed to best capture the knowledge, skills, and attitudes whose acquisition we strive to realize through our courses and co-curricular experiences (e.g., internships, research projects). It soon became clear, however, that our assessment data were presenting a static image of the performance levels of our students, an image that masked the fact that our goals are equal in terms of neither their intellectual expectations nor the program locus at which they should be accomplished. My colleague, Dr. Luke Dalfiume, accordingly suggested that we organize the goals on the basis of Bloom's taxonomy, an undertaking that we believe promises to lead to a more dynamic and accurate representation of student achievement within the psychology major.

In a now classic monograph on higher education, Bloom outlined a system for classifying educational goals to facilitate the development and evaluation of college and university curricula (Bloom et al. 1956). Specifically, he proposed a hierarchical taxonomy of student behaviors that reflect the development of increasingly complex cognitive abilities and skills as a result of instructional experiences. Although Bloom's classification model has not gone without criticism (e.g., Ormell 1974; Pring 1971; Sockett 1971), its heuristic value is revealed by the fact that it has exerted a strong influence on classroom instruction research (Anderson 1994); has guided curriculum development in other countries (e.g., Chung 1994; Lewy and Bathory 1994); and has been recommended as a tool for test construction (Sax 1989) and test validation (Salvia and Ysseldyke 1991). In the section that follows, a brief overview is provided of the taxonomy and its use in categorizing the goals of the psychology major at Eureka College.

Classification of Psychology Department Goals

Bloom suggested that performance objectives in education can be meaningfully classified according to a hierarchy of intellectual competence consisting of, in order of cognitive sophistication, the categories of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Definitions of each category are presented below, along with the classification of psychology goals we found to be most helpful for program evaluation purposes. Listed in parentheses are the numbers originally assigned to each goal.

- ◇ **Knowledge.** The "knowledge" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to remember information, ranging from the simple and concrete (e.g., terminology and facts) to the complex and abstract (e.g., principles and theories).
  - ○ Acquire an awareness of the principal phenomena and findings that represent what is known about mind and behavior (1).

  - Develop a knowledge base of the theories used to explain and the practices used to influence psychological functioning (2).
  - Know how mind and body develop throughout the lifespan and how they interact to produce mental and physical health (4).
  - Learn of the individuals, systems of thought, and zeitgeists that constitute the ancient and modern roots of psychology (5).

- **Comprehension.** The "comprehension" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to understand material at a level sufficient for grasping its meaning and inferring its implications.
  - Understand and evaluate the descriptive, relational, and experimental methods of scientific inquiry (9).
  - Learn how variables can be manipulated and controlled in research to enable the formation of causal inferences (10).
  - Recognize the issues involved in assessing and establishing the validity and reliability of psychological tests (11).
  - Achieve familiarity with the nature and uses of the common ability and personality tests employed by psychologists (12).
  - Comprehend the principles and applications of univariate descriptive and inferential statistics (13).

- **Application.** The "application" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to correctly and independently bring to bear abstractions (e.g., theories, principles, methods) in solving concrete problems.
  - Acquire facility in using computers for data collection, statistical analysis, and research publication (26).
  - Learn to utilize with competence the resources of libraries and both academic and public information services (27).
  - Communicate effectively in oral and written media with an appropriate awareness of the intended audience (28).
  - Attain the skills necessary for working as members of groups and for fostering collegial relationships (29).

- **Analysis.** The "analysis" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to parse information into its constituent elements and to identify the relationships among those elements.
  - Understand the value of exploring data without imposing the constraints of statistical conclusions (14).
  - Achieve proficiency in designing, implementing, analyzing, and reporting independent research projects (17).
  - Understand and observe the ethical principles associated with the treatment of animal and human subjects (21).
  - Understand and observe the ethical principles associated with the collection and dissemination of results (22).
  - Tolerate uncertainty in the search for truth (23).

- **Synthesis.** The "synthesis" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to combine elements into new wholes (e.g., ideas, plans of action, abstract relations) that are more than the sums of their respective parts.
  - Know the importance of studying behavior at the biological, cognitive, personal, and sociocultural levels of analysis (3).
  - Interpret historical change in psychology through the use of theories from the philosophy of science (6).
  - Develop a sensitivity to the unity that defines psychology and a tolerance of the diversity that defines its fields (8).
  - Acknowledge the attitudes and assumptions that characterize social scientists and mental health practitioners (15).

  - ○ Pursue instructive experiences outside of the classroom in both laboratory and service settings (18).
  - ○ Adopt and cultivate a specific area of interest that will afford preparation for post-graduate jobs and/or education (30).

- ◇ **Evaluation.** The "evaluation" category consists of behaviors that reflect the ability to offer quantitative and qualitative judgments about the value of ideas and methods.
  - ○ Analyze and pursue positions regarding the core debates that motivate theory and practice in psychology (7).
  - ○ Develop a curiosity for seeking knowledge and an enthusiasm for applying knowledge where appropriate (16).
  - ○ Become intelligent consumers of empirical data distributed through lay and professional media (19).
  - ○ Think about issues, findings, and conclusions in ways that are independent, critical, creative, and purposeful (20).
  - ○ Adapt to change in the discovery of truth (24).
  - ○ Develop a sense of responsibility for one's intellectual, moral, and professional development (25).

Implications for Assessment

One of the virtues of using a developmental model such as Bloom's taxonomy to organize curricular goals is that it facilitates the degree to which a program's assessment plan can be coordinated with the progression in cognitive abilities and skills that is expected as a result of participation in that program. With regard to the psychology major at Eureka College, my colleague and I are now in the process of articulating, for each goal, performance objectives whose measurement will tap the competence associated with the category into which the goal has been classified. I would argue that a similar process might prove fruitful for our general education program as well. We could use Bloom's taxonomy to sequence chronologically the courses and experiences that constitute our new framework and to more precisely measure the effectiveness of those components in light of the proficiencies they are designed to develop. To the extent that we can make more evident the kind of growth we aspire to foster in our students, I believe our curricula can be shaped to better bring about that growth.

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How General Education Reform has Improved Faculty Development for Teaching at William Jewell College

Milton P. Horne
Judith Dilts

Introduction

The literature on faculty development has been extensive and helpful, (Angelo 1993, 1994; Eble and McKeachie 1985) but the nature of faculty development at William Jewell College took a new form and significance during the planning, development, and implementation/maintenance stages of the college's general education curriculum entitled, *The Responsible Self*. The following presentation explains this new "form and significance" by setting out, first, an overview of the new general education program vis-a-vis those it replaced and, second, by highlighting the most important new challenges the faculty faced in the process of curricular reform. Those specific challenges may be summarized here as new content, new forms of teaching accountability, and new methods of teaching and assessment.

Overview of Program

William Jewell's general education program, entitled *The Responsible Self*, was designed and implemented over a seven-year period beginning in 1993 and saw the graduation of its first class in May 2000. The new thirty-eight credit hour integrated curriculum replaced two programs that were offered to students as optional general education experiences. The most commonly selected program was a sixty-two credit hour distributional curricular format. The second option, known as the *Foundations* program, was a twenty-four-hour integrated, interdisciplinary core curriculum whose six four-credit hour courses were team taught. It could accommodate only about sixty new students per year.

In the distributional program, students satisfied general education goals and objectives by choosing courses that were most typically offered as regular parts of departmental major curricula. Needless to say, many of the courses counted doubly for the major and for the general education requirements, and the faculty came to believe that students were not attaining as rich a general education as they might if courses were designed exclusively to meet the college's general education requirements. The new Responsible Self curriculum, with its new themes and especially with its interdisciplinary modes of investigation, required that faculty be willing, if not yet able, to move beyond the confines of their focused academic training.

The new program seeks to maximize several curricular features that have been shown to be of greatest benefit to undergraduate student learning (Astin 1993; Chickering and Reiser 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). Such features include an overall structure and content of the curriculum that facilitates for students a common experience, cognitive development, and appreciation of the relevance of knowledge as interdisciplinary. The introductory four credit hour course is common to all first-year students and introduces the first level of study in addition to expectations for later levels of study. Through the use of common texts, common assignments, and its offering as a required course for all incoming students, the course facilitates: (1) horizontal interface with other Level I courses; (2) vertical connections with upper level courses; (3) a cohort effect for students; and (4) interconnections with the first year program (*Time Magazine*, September 6, 2001).

Level II coursework typically begins in the second semester of the first year and continues throughout the junior year. The courses at the intermediate level are all interdisciplinary, granting a great deal of latitude to instructors in various disciplines and fields of study. The aim of each course is mainly to illustrate interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge, but also to illustrate thereby the relevance of knowledge and learning to real world questions. The intermediate courses continue to develop the basic transferable learning skills introduced at the beginning level of the program.

The capstone experience (Level III) is team-taught due to the complexity of the objectives and is reserved for the student's senior year. The content of these courses must meet the following goals: (1) investigates a question or issue that is open-ended in that it requires students to take a position on the basis of their own reading and analysis; (2) requires the application of competing ethical models in evaluating the particular question or issue; and (3) requires the application of scientific knowledge in understanding one dimension of the question or issue.

Two further points complete this brief overview of the program: program assessment and program administration. The college retains a portfolio of one written assignment from each general education course. The college also invites both first-year students and senior students to participate in assessment focus groups in which each student reflects upon the specific goals of the general education program. The nine teams of faculty teaching at three levels of the program are each coordinated by a faculty coordinator. The coordinators do not receive any release time for their extra work, but are paid a modest stipend to coordinate budgeting, staffing, assessment, advising, course development and approval, and especially faculty development for each faculty team. The associate dean for the program coordinates the work of team coordinators and is accountable to the provost of the college.

Specific Faculty Development Needs and the College's Response

The new curriculum has challenged faculty in many ways, but three of the ways especially illustrate the connection between the curriculum design and changes in faculty development for teaching: mastering new content, developing new teaching methods, and responding to more public kinds of accountability. While such needs existed in both of the old general education curricula, three features of the revised curriculum made these needs evident to all on the faculty instead of a few faculty in departments: specific programmatic goals and objectives at every level of the program, the administrative structure and responsibility of the program, and the college's commitment to teach in such a way as to obtain feedback on the program's performance vis-a-vis its goals and objectives. What follows are just a few examples of how these three features of the program addressed the specific challenges mentioned above.

☐ Goals and Objectives and Content Issues

Perhaps the most immediately daunting challenge came in the first year common course entitled *The Responsible Self.* The course is text-based and aims to (1) expose students to four comparatively different worldviews; (2) explore the relationship of the individual to the community from the perspectives of those worldviews; and (3) introduce students to college-level communication skills through both oral and writing assignments. Most faculty had never read the texts (Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*; Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*; *The Bhagavad-Gita*; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*; Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*), let alone taught them. The initial faculty development workshops were simply reading workshops; the participants read the texts in advance and, with the help of an outside expert, came together to discuss the text in relationship to the theme. This kind of activity has been the most consistently helpful faculty development activity since it developed into an ongoing weekly meeting of the team that teaches that course (Meacham and Ludwig 1997).

☐ Teaching Methods and Administrative Structure

A second challenge comes from the curriculum's explicit and implicit commitment to "student centered" modes of instruction. By "student centered" we mean more investigative, hands-on, problem-solving, discussion oriented modes of exploring the particular phenomena at the heart of specific general education courses. Each faculty team, which corresponds to a specific area of the curriculum, is coordinated by a team leader (coordinator) who identifies the specific needs of the team and plans multiple sessions to address the team's needs. The Level II science, technology, and human experience team has had to address a specific need to move from a lecture-demonstration mode of scientific investigation to a more explicitly investigative lab-based mode of scientific teaching. The team coordinator organizes ongoing conversations about how effective such teaching is in the individual courses. The mode of instruction–hands-on, investigative, problem-based–is influenced by the work of Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL 1991); several of the science faculty at William Jewell are members of the Faculty for the 21st Century network.

☐ Accountability and Assessment Feedback

William Jewell College's commitment to teaching writing across the curriculum precedes the tenure of this writer. Yet, faculty judged that implementing such a general education program through departmentally centered commitments to writing instruction weakened the program. Under the present structure, all general education courses teach to specific writing outcomes. The retention in a student portfolio of one paper from each general education class has, however, created a greater sense of accountability before peers. The biannual meetings in which faculty read selections from these portfolios (one in faculty "winterim" and one at end of spring term in May) has intensified faculty resistance to assessment generally. Despite the increased resistance, such reading sessions have made very clear to the faculty that student writing has not and does not progress in ways the faculty had always thought it should and in fact had.

Conclusion

While no one doubted that revising William Jewell's general education curriculum would call for greater faculty development initially, what has happened has more longitudinal importance. The college's commitment to assessment joined with an administrative structure to plan and ongoing faculty development has facilitated both the initial implementation and the subsequent maintenance of the faculty who teach the program. The expense has been significant, and costs will have to be reexamined, to be sure. Still, there can be no question that faculty development for teaching has become more meaningful in its relationship to the teaching needs of the faculty through the development and implementation of William Jewell's new general education curriculum.

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How 42 Faculty Assess 52 General Education Outcomes: A Course Embedded Model

Richard W. Stroede
Jeffrey S. Weaner

Introduction

The idea certainly seems silly—why would you want to have fifty-two general education outcomes, much less assess them? How would you approach the task if you felt you needed to? This paper and the corresponding presentation present one such model at Defiance College (Ohio) and suggests some benefits and challenges of course embedded assessment and a student-specific assessment database.

Institutional Background

Defiance College is a small (head count of 1,000), church-related (United Church of Christ), liberal arts-based institution recognized by the Templeton Foundation for its character building programs. Since 1995, it has become a national leader in service learning, employing a unique, course-based model in which students take both general education and major discipline courses with service learning components. With its largest majors being professional education and business, the college maintains a strong liberal arts base while providing excellent professional preparation. The faculty has had a long commitment to quality general education dating back to a 1986 academic plan that established interdisciplinary core courses, a freshman seminar, and capstone courses in all majors.

How the Assessment Plan Evolved

Building upon the 1986 academic plan, the faculty developed thirteen institutional general education learning outcomes and began the process of identifying means to assess student learning. By the last North Central Association comprehensive visit in the fall of 1992, a plan had been established and instruments were being piloted. The Consultant-Evaluators found the plan to be solid and the initiatives encouraging, judged assessment at the college to be developmentally ahead of most other institutions, and suggested no follow-up action.

In 1994, a new president arrived, replacing an individual who had been at the college for nineteen years. Within the next year, an intensive strategic planning operation resulted in a new mission statement and a commitment to service learning. The faculty established a new educational philosophy interpreting the mission statement and began to revise the learning outcomes. Since the previous outcomes had proven too vague to assess effectively, there was interest in moving to statements of abilities that could be more easily assessed. Using ideas from Alverno College (Wisconsin), the faculty developed a series of thirteen outcomes, each with four developmental levels—resulting in fifty-two separate performance statements (these will be available in the Defiance College Assessment Handbook, which can be found in the Annual Meeting Resource Room). Having decided to develop a course-based model for service learning, the use of course embedded assessment seemed logical. Kings College (Pennsylvania) provided an impressive and inspiring model.

How the Plan Operates

Within the thirteen outcomes are several that are transferable and cut across all the disciplines (these are common to most colleges and are frequently the only general education outcomes) as well as some that are discipline specific.

At this point in the evolution of the plan, the faculty have recognized that it is not possible for all students to take enough courses to achieve all fifty-two outcomes, so that the upper levels of the discipline specific outcomes will be fully achieved only by students majoring in those disciplines.

Generally, the first two developmental levels of the outcomes are assessed in general education courses and the upper two levels are assessed in major discipline courses. The faculty have chosen courses for assessment points that include subject matter and skill development corresponding to the specific outcomes. But it is important to note that these are not the only courses in which the students will experience learning applicable to that outcome. The exception is outcome number 12, service learning, where each course that includes a service component also includes assessment of that outcome.

When faculty design courses that are included in the assessment grid, they are to include information in the course syllabus about the assessment component and how it will be completed. They identify an instrument—a paper, portion of an exam, a project, or some other means—that will allow them to determine if each member of the class is performing at the level described in the specific outcome. This is reported on what is essentially a class list, and a course assessment report is completed that identifies the procedure used to make the determination, including the assignment and any rubric or set of standards applied, as well as a statement about the effectiveness of the effort. In addition, faculty are asked to provide examples of completed instruments—the most outstanding one from the class and the one that is the lowest minimally acceptable (the cut point). These are collected anonymously, with the student's name masked.

The class list identifying those who failed to perform up to standard is entered in a database; the course assessment report and the attached documentation are reviewed by the division head who reviews both the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system and is then filed in the academic dean's office. Each year, in a rolling review of all outcomes, a faculty reading group reviews the documentation submitted and makes recommendations for improvement of the system to the assessment committee as well as observations about student performance. The reviewed documentation is retained as an evidentiary file.

What We Have Learned

The most significant of the known advantages of course-based assessment is that assessment is rooted in the classroom where all teaching and learning take place. We have found that to be the case. The faculty do not need to create additional instruments to make performance decisions; they simply use components that already exist within the course. Nor does the student need to complete additional tasks. What is required is adequate planning to identify where in the course the best evidence exists and to collect the necessary documentation. Thus assessment of the learning outcomes is a natural part of what already happens in the teaching-learning environment. This is not to suggest that there is not extra effort required on behalf of the faculty, but both the faculty and students have an opportunity to view assessment of student learning as a seamless part of the educational enterprise. There is, however, some discussion about the subjective nature of the performance decisions in determining what is acceptable performance for each outcome. That discussion is not viewed as a weakness but rather as a productive component of the operation.

The use of major discipline courses as assessment points for general education outcomes has demonstrated to faculty the need for integrated and cohesive transferable skills and knowledge. Moreover, it allows disciplines to examine how core knowledge and skills (e.g., communication, problem solving, critical thinking) apply to and are adapted to the specific discipline.

In the process of identifying course components to assess general education outcomes, faculty have become more aware of the knowledge and skill development taking place in the courses. It has become clearer that such development is constant and ongoing, leading to the realization that all courses in some way contribute to general education outcomes. In some instances, faculty have developed assessment tools that contributed to the improvement of their evaluation and grading methods.

It is well recognized that assessment should be faculty owned. From the development of the outcomes, the assessment plan, the identification of assessment points, and the review of documentation, to the modification of the plan, this has been a faculty operation. Though there are still those who think it is not a useful endeavor, there has been a minimum of conflict in the development and operation of the plan.

We are generating a wealth of data and documentation. So that we could capture all the data for future use and evolving methods of analysis, each separate assessment is retained as a line of data: that is, a specific student in a specific course, in a specific semester, assessed for performance in a specific development level of a specific outcome.

Though the results are becoming a huge data file, all varieties of analysis are possible, and all the demographic, input, and academic records on individual students are available to be linked to the assessment data. Students are aware that no part of this operation impacts their grades or their progress toward a degree and that individual students are never studied except as part of cohort groups.

Data analysis is just beginning to yield useful information:

- Around 90 percent of all students assessed in all outcomes are performing at an acceptable level.
- Acceptable performance in the first level of the outcomes is higher than in the next two levels, perhaps because the first level of performance is near that expected by a strong high school graduate.
- Performance at the highest level is strong (mid 90 percent achievement rate), reflecting the accomplishment of our graduates.
- Our female students have performance rates about 5 percent above our male students.
- A similar gap is seen between commuters and residential students, with residents performing at a lower level.
- Upper classmen taking lower-level courses perform at a much higher level than freshmen and sophomores.

What Is Left to Be Done?

Although we have successfully designed a process to assess an enormous number of outcomes, we are close to the point where we need to consider whether we can streamline the plan. In many cases, one course has three or more outcomes assigned for assessment, presenting somewhat of a hardship for faculty. Since the college is currently completing a self-study, the advice of The Higher Learning Commission's Consultant-Evaluator team in October 2002 will provide a natural starting point for a thorough review of the Assessment operation as well as the nature of general education at the college.

We have several outcomes that still need additional assessment points. This is particularly true of our leadership outcome. Though this is an important goal within our mission statement, and though it is clearly a goal of our major disciplines and service learning, the faculty have felt that student life should play an important part in the achievement and assessment of the outcome. This has slowed its implementation.

We are just beginning to examine the validity of our findings. Obviously, increased use of common matrices and multiple or blind-reviews might be desirable. The initial steps in the analysis are to establish internal threshold norms for each of the outcomes' developmental levels based on reasonable expectations of attainment as shown by our data and available regional or national norms. These thresholds will serve to flag outcomes and student categories whose success rates fall below institutional norms. Identified outcomes and groups (deviant cases) will then be subjected to further analysis.

The application of findings in the improvement of instruction, student learning, and ongoing institutional planning is spotty. There have been substantial and continuous changes at Defiance College in the past five years; it is sometimes difficult to see the impact of our findings in those decision making processes.

Conclusion

After experiencing some difficulties with earlier assessment attempts, a revised mission statement in 1995 provided the Defiance College faculty an opportunity to modify institutional learning outcomes and identify new assessment strategies. The resulting fifty-two performance statements and a course embedded model of assessment have challenged faculty resources while beginning to provide a wealth of data and documentation and rich discussion of the nature of general education. Though innovative in design and firmly based in the educational program, the evolving program will undoubtedly be broadly modified as the usefulness of data analyses emerges.

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Part 3
Self-Study and Evaluation

Chapter 12
Coordinating the Self-Study

The Higher Learning Commission

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Self-Study: The Proof is in the Plan, Process, and Product

Marie A. Giacomelli

The nature of self-study can easily and mistakenly become a multitude of separate tasks rather than a series of interdependent activities. Establishing and maintaining cohesiveness as the self-study evolves is critical to the eventual outcome. Assuming that the self-study has multiple purposes—accreditation requirements, AND any/all of the following: institutional improvement, quality assurance, organizational learning, and organizational renewal/ transformation—its outcome has both internal and external importance for the institution.

Coordinating the accreditation self-study can be compared to the sequential steps of the management process: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and monitoring. The checklist of tasks and activities to accomplish, whether for a comprehensive or focused self-study, can indeed be daunting! However, recognizing at the outset that each task or activity is an integral part of *the plan* AND *the process* AND *the product* is advantageous.

The case that each accreditation self-study task or activity affects all three components—plan, process, and product—cannot be overstated. Therefore, from the perspective of coordinating the self-study, the following discussion focuses on opinions about the connectedness of the three self-study components rather than on the myriad of self-study tasks and activities.

The Plan

Successful self-study is authentic, so there is no one prescription for it. The distinctiveness of the institution itself—its mission, culture, and climate—is the fabric from which the self-study plan can and should be fashioned. Regardless of who is responsible for developing the self-study plan, some preliminary questions should be pondered as the first step, since the answers have overarching implications for all three self-study components. For example:

- Is the self-study viewed as an opportunity or as a threat?
- Is momentum for institutional improvement/change part of the equation?
- Is institutional self-analysis ongoing and dynamic?
- Have institutional reviews in the past encountered difficulties and can they be avoided this time?
- Is the institution's decision making process centralized or decentralized?
- Is the institution data rich or data poor?
- What evaluative practices are in place that can be built upon?

A meaningful self-study design is centered on well-defined objectives reflective of the institutional mission, culture, and climate. Developing the objectives should take into account the various audiences as well as the institution's past history, current state, and vision for the future. To form the institutional context, making a conceptual inventory of the institution—what has been accomplished and experienced since the last comprehensive self-study—is well worth the investment of time and energy. Reviewing all reports and accompanying responses from the last comprehensive and any interim focused evaluations is equally important. One additional advisable strategy is determining a theme for the self-study. Clarifying and articulating a theme is a unifying force. It creates an institutional identity and enables the self-study to take its own shape. It provides the story line and helps develop and sustain the needed resolve.

The audiences for the self-study and the goals that pertain to them are usually diverse. The goals for the internal audience–faculty, staff, students, board members, and other constituents–might range from professional development to institutional awareness to participation in institutional self-analysis, planning, and/or priority-setting. On the other hand, the goals of the self-study related to the external audiences, including The Higher Learning Commission, address the fulfillment of specified criteria or standards and the institution's "public image." For all audiences, self-study is the institution's opportunity to create a dynamic snapshot of itself, a culminating report (product) that is underpinned by widespread participation (process).

The Process

An appropriate work structure is essential to support the key actions of self-study: communicating, documenting, analyzing, interpreting, synthesizing, evaluating, prioritizing. Defining who, how, when (plan), and what (product) is the initial step relative to the self-study process. This step requires reflection on questions like those mentioned in the previous section of this paper and on the drafted self-study objectives. These two "plan" elements, along with the self-study theme, provide the foundation for the self-study process.

The effectiveness of the process is dependent on the principles that guide its design. Assuming that the process design aspects include naming a steering committee, organizing working committees, and identifying the parameters that apply to the key self-study actions, the following are important considerations:

- **Assure inclusiveness, but be clear that participation is voluntary.** Recognize that many individuals will know little about accreditation or formalized self-study. An open invitation from the president followed closely by informational and orientation meetings can set the stage for institution-wide involvement and understanding of the self-study's importance and use.

- **Align the composition and responsibilities of the working committees with the self-study objectives.** A matrix that correlates committee goals, accreditation criteria, and patterns of evidence with the self-study objectives provides a helpful road map to keep all effort focused. An effective steering committee consciously encourages appropriate latitude and creativity among all participants in the self-study and concurrently provides guidance, central direction, and boundaries.

- **Outline the available methodologies that can be incorporated in committee work.** Capitalize on existing institutional mechanisms and data sources that furnish quantitative and qualitative information. Setting up a reference room where the self-study committees can work and have easy access to institutional information contributes to greater productivity.

- **Develop and adhere to a timeline for committee work as well as institution-wide communication.** Remember that time for analysis and reflection as well as reports on progress and broad awareness is important. A realistic timeline takes into account a wide variety of dynamics–both anticipated and unanticipated–that unfold during the self-study period. At minimum, the timeline should have adequate, built-in leeway for resolving differences of opinion and information, handling voluminous amounts of detail that may lack focus, following up on institutional dimensions that might have been overlooked, and reaching conclusions about what findings are sufficiently important to the institution as a whole.

The Product

This component of accreditation self-study is oftentimes viewed solely as "the end"–the Self-Study Report produced, the team Resource Room arranged, the logistics of the on-site visit decided. Instead, in the "proof" paradigm–plan, process, product–those aspects are as much the beginning of self-study as they are the end! The product of self-study begins with the very basic differentiation between describing the institution and evaluating it and how that distinction is factored into the plan and process components.

At the beginning of self-study, the product design should include drafting the macro outline of the Self-Study Report to reflect the objectives and theme delineated as part of the self-study plan. Building the catalog of potential documentation for the team Resource Room should amplify and support the first impression of the institution made by the Self-Study Report. Another central element at this point is articulating how self-study information will be used beyond fulfilling accreditation requirements and what, if any, are the anticipated self-study follow-up strategies. For instance, the institution may choose an ad hoc implementation committee as the mechanism to propose how the identified opportunities and challenges might be addressed in future planning and budgeting cycles.

The time and intensity of work devoted to self-study by the "volunteers" who commit to the steering committee and working committees need to be addressed in the product design. Defining the value of organizational learning and professional development as outcomes of self-study is important to establishing *esprit de corps* and avoiding disintegration during the self-study journey.

The Proof

At Robert Morris College, using the "proof" paradigm for self-study has achieved many goals related to institutional accreditation, change, and quality. It has been applied several times during the past ten years for focused evaluations as the institution undertook institutional change and quality initiatives with the addition of new locations, a new degree level, and new degree programs. Most recently, during the 1998–2001 comprehensive self-study cycle, it resulted in continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years, simultaneous approval of three change requests, and no required interim reports or visits.

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Getting It Right from the Start! Ten Keys to a Successful Beginning for Your Self-Study

Gayle Krzemien

As self-study coordinator for an institution, you face a daunting challenge. When I was first approached to take on this responsibility at Pikes Peak Community College, it appealed to my interest in organization and coordination of multi-dimensional tasks. However, as I had not had significant previous experience with a self-study, my naiveté may have been the greatest factor in my accepting the challenge! The writer for our Self-Study Report and I were both recruited by our vice-president for educational services in February 2000. Our college was scheduled to have its next evaluation visit in the 2003–2004 year. We attended the 2000 Annual Meeting, which gave us initial exposure to the self-study process.

Over the next summer, I spent a lot of time thinking about how to develop an overall plan for this effort. As we moved into the fall semester, the plan began to take shape and, over the next year, the steering committee developed a solid, comprehensive approach for the self-study. Following are what we believe to be ten keys to what provided a strong beginning at our college. Although your college's size, resources, and culture may differ from ours, we hope you will find one or more of the ideas presented here adaptable to your circumstances.

1. Recruit a Solid Steering Committee as the Core for Your Self-Study Effort

My initial thought was to recruit chairs for each anticipated subcommittee and have them choose their own co-chairs. At first I envisioned that this group, the writer, and I would form our steering committee. However, as I looked at other colleges' Self-Study Reports and noted how many subcommittees they had used, I soon realized that this would be an unmanageable number for an effective working steering committee.

My next plan was to recruit someone to coordinate each of the following areas: prior concerns, GIRs, and each of the five criteria. I ended up recruiting seven people for these tasks. With the writer and me, that made a steering committee of nine that has been workable and practical; and, after one-and-a-half years working with this structure, I would recommend it. We met for the first time as a steering committee in November 2000. It is especially important to choose this group carefully, as the group will need to work cohesively over a period of two or more years as well as maintain the focus and energy of the college constituents throughout the self-study process. Look for people who have a broad knowledge base of the college, a solid work ethic, and a mix of length of service. It is important to include the perspectives of those who present a spectrum of longevity at the college.

2. Recruit a Public Relations-Communications Team Separate from Your Steering Committee

The job of members of the steering committee is to focus on the logistics of planning the self-study, recruiting appropriate subcommittee members, and supervising their activities to ensure that the overall timeline is being observed and that all efforts are coordinated and meet deadlines. If members also attempt to take on the responsibility for maintaining visibility, producing ongoing information items for distribution, and generating enthusiasm, they will find that these efforts will tend to fall by the wayside as other responsibilities become increasingly demanding.

Instead, recruit a group of people whose sole responsibility is to attend to the public relations dimension of the self-study effort. This group should work in concert with the steering committee members, but free them from having primary responsibility for public relations, communications, and visibility promotions. If possible, recruit some of these people from those among the college who enjoy theatrics to maintain a light and fun spirit.

Remember, you will be asking people who are already overworked to take on yet another responsibility. It is essential that an element of humor and levity be woven throughout the required work.

One of our visibility efforts is distributing shirts with the self-study logo on the back and "Pikes Peak Community College Self-Study 2003" on the front to participants. We designate one Friday per month as Self-Study Friday and encourage everyone with a shirt to wear it on that day.

3. Plan a *Fun* Kick-Off to Create Initial Exposure at Your College

When The Higher Learning Commission staff liaison visited our campus in fall 2000, she noted that we lacked energy and that as self-study coordinator I needed to find a way to infuse some fun into this process. She also stressed that it was important for the college to see our vice president for educational services as the champion of this effort. As a Chicago-area native and because the Commission's headquarters are also in Chicago, I thought about using a Chicago mobster theme for our kick-off event. The steering committee eventually drafted a skit that included our vice president, Dr. Ray (who has a Ph.D. in chemistry), as "Eddie the Chemist." Preceding the skit, the campus was invited to a buffet lunch–always a good tactic to ensure attendance! Prior to the kick-off, we had taken digital pictures of Dr. Ray as "da boss," that are used repeatedly in various venues.

Initially, two of our faculty members frisked audience plants for concealed weapons. The steering committee then came out onto a dimly lit stage to the strains of "The Godfather Waltz." We had previously placed the outline of a body center stage on the floor, reminiscent of a crime scene. When the area had been declared safe by the bodyguards, one of them brought Eddie downstage. The audience applauded wildly when they realized the identity of "da Boss." Seeing our VP in such an uncharacteristic role not only got people's attention, but also kicked off our self-study with a humorous, light-hearted spirit–an element that our college sometimes lacks. Once on stage, Eddie had his "mouthpiece," "Steve the Bookman" (one of our reference librarians), pose various questions to the steering committee regarding this NCA "caper."

One of the major benefits of our approach was that while we sponsored several fun and informational opportunities regarding the upcoming self-study, we did not press people for immediate commitment. In fact, we had several people approach us and ask, "When will someone be asking me to volunteer?" It is important to be sensitive to the fact that the vast majority of people who are approached to volunteer for the self-study are already overstretched. You must constantly remember that although you have taken on a significant leadership role in this effort, most other people feel they are already doing all they can.

4. Have Your Entire Steering Committee Attend the Next Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting

A great unifying experience for our steering committee is that we were all able to attend the 2001 Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting. Besides being able to have all members attend sessions and pool their findings and ideas, it provided us with an opportunity to bond in a non-institutional setting. One night, we made reservations to go to the dinner/show at Tommy Guns Garage. As we had used the Chicago mobster theme for our campus kick-off, this was particularly fun for us. It is important for the steering committee members to remember to promote a sense of unity within the group, as their energy needs to carry the college through the self-study effort. Encourage the college to find the funding to send you, as a team, to the next Annual Meeting, and borrow, steal, and adapt every good idea presented. Several of our best ideas came from information and suggestions at sessions one or more of us attended.

5. Recruit a Data Collection Team

This is a very valuable idea from a session presented by Oklahoma City University at the 2001 Annual Meeting. We adapted the idea of having a data coordinator process all requests from the various subcommittees for data reports, synthesize and organize them, then request data based on year-end reports. In that way, duplicate or similar report requests are eliminated, and there is an efficient coordination of this phase of the process. We took this idea one step further by using our director of institutional research as the chair of this team, acknowledging that he and his staff were the best-informed group to process the data requests. An extremely valuable dimension is that the director consulted with the subcommittees and, rather than asking them to submit requests for specific data reports, he instead advised them to submit the questions they were seeking to answer with data. Often, those unfamiliar with data analysis do not know specifically what report will answer what question. By having the institutional research staff match the subcommittee needs with the correct reports, we avoid running unnecessary reports and streamline our process.

6. Create a Self-Study Guide for Use by All Those in Leadership Positions

We developed a self-study guide notebook that provides background information on the self-study process; The Higher Learning Commission and the history of accreditation; a comprehensive timeline for our process; and various items of information about the structure, roles, and responsibilities outlined by our steering committee. The guide was provided in three-ring notebook form so that updates and additions could be easily inserted with the intent that this would be a working document throughout our process.

A copy of our self-study guide is available in the Annual Meeting Resource Room for your reference.

7. Create a Separate Drive on Your College Network Dedicated to the Self-Study

Our college has three primary campuses, which often makes it difficult to keep everyone up-to-date. Although we use e-mail extensively, as do most colleges, we needed a way to post information pertinent to the self-study in a permanent location as well as a place to direct people for information updates. Our institutional technology division created a separate drive on our college network that is dedicated to the self-study. All documents that comprise our guide, along with varied items such as the parameters of the scholarship we award to participating students, updated reports to the cabinet, and ideas the steering committee has gleaned from the previous Annual Meeting have been posted on the drive. Anytime a section of the guide is updated, a change is made in the timeline, or an addition is made to the guide, I send a notification e-mail to the steering committee, the cabinet, and the subcommittee chairs and co-chairs, all of whom have access to the drive, so they can access the new information and update their guides. Our steering committee decided that I should be the only person with write privileges to this drive so that documents could not be inadvertently altered. We also created several distribution lists on our e-mail system so that anyone in the college can easily communicate with the steering committee or any subgroup.

8. Use These Tips for Recruiting Effective Subcommittees

One effective recruiting strategy mentioned above is to create early awareness without soliciting immediate response. Build a sense of awareness about the process before approaching people. In the spring 2001 semester, we distributed a personnel survey to get basic information about people and give them an opportunity to indicate their areas of preference for contributing and areas of expertise. We provided follow-up opportunities in both the summer 2001 and fall 2001 semesters so that as awareness and interest increased, we could achieve maximum response to the survey. The administrative assistant who supports our self-study entered this information into an Access database and then ran reports that could be used by the steering committee and subcommittees to seek out individuals interested in specific areas and those who might be appropriate as resources.

It is important to avoid the tendency to recruit only those already familiar with each area of investigation. Often those not familiar with an area ask the most probing questions and have the least influenced answers. You will achieve a deeper level of investigation by having your current practices questioned and examined from multiple perspectives.

We also offer a scholarship of three credits' tuition to students who participate as active members of a subcommittee. Student information can be gathered from institutional surveys that are routinely used, but the scholarship offers us an incentive to get more hands-on student participation. We plan to have a group from student government be readers of the final report before its submission to the Commission.

Finally, and this may be your best drawing card, I highly recommend having subcommittees submit report information using a template. By having one person designated as the writer who receives all the information and then transforms it into the final document, you avoid two significant problems. The first is that if individual subcommittees submit independent reports for their respective areas of investigation, someone eventually must transform those into one document with a single voice. People often become possessive of their words and may take offense when there are substantial editorial changes. The second is that by requiring subcommittees to submit only *information*, you remove the barrier to volunteering for membership that arises when people are intimidated by the writing process. By emphasizing that their task is to gather information, not write a report, you are more likely to get willing participants.

9. Hold a Self-Study Workshop

Holding a Self-Study Workshop is an idea gleaned from a session presented by North Arkansas College at the 2001 Annual Meeting. I recruited the steering committee members in fall 2000; the initial meeting of those contacted for the PR-communications team was in December 2000; and our kick-off was in March 2001. The steering committee and the PR-communications team continued to work on awareness throughout the spring 2001 semester. That fall, the steering committee members began recruiting the subcommittee chairs and co-chairs that they anticipated they would need for their respective areas. Then, in October 2001, we held an all-day Self-Study Workshop that was fully supported by the attendance of college administrators, including the president. (Note that our steering committee had been working and planning, behind the scenes, for almost an entire year before the official work was launched at the workshop. Build in as much upfront planning time as possible before you recruit participants for subcommittees. The more organized you are and the more planning you can demonstrate, the more likely that people will be willing to participate.)

The participants in our workshop included the president, his cabinet members, the steering committee, and all subcommittee chairs and co-chairs. The workshop was intended to serve several purposes:

- Create a sense of unity among those responsible for the overall leadership of the self-study effort. This workshop provided an excellent opportunity for our new president, who did not come from higher education, to become oriented to the self-study process and get to know the key players.
- Provide an overview of the timeline, and emphasize the need to keep on schedule.
- Build cohesion among the cabinet members, who would eventually need to be resource persons for the various subcommittees, and the subcommittee chairs and co-chairs.
- Familiarize all chairs and co-chairs with the way to request, gather, and report data so there is consistency of process.

One final note on the workshop: I would strongly recommend that the members of your college leadership attend, especially your president and vice-president of instruction. It is vital that the campus community sees them involved as supporters and resources, but not as directors in this effort.

10. Use Your College Leadership to Support the Self-Study

Do not ignore the value of having your college president and vice-presidents continue to emphasize the importance of the effort and the expectation that everyone in the college needs to contribute to the self-study. Two important ways we used our cabinet for support were to stress the importance of attendance at the workshop and to support widespread participation from people in all areas.

Just prior to the workshop, our steering committee members began to get messages from several of their chairs and co-chairs that they had "other obligations" for that day–division meetings, committee meetings, etc. Certainly, those who had unavoidable prior commitments for out-of-town meetings were understandably excused. However, most people on any campus these days can plead that they are "too busy" to respond to various demands. I sent an e-mail to both of our vice-presidents regarding this concern, and they came through with a very clear message to the entire campus that attendance at the Self-Study Workshop was to be considered a priority. Remember: your institution cannot serve your students and community unless it retains its accreditation status. Therefore, it is a PRIORITY that everyone must understand that other obligations may need to periodically take a backseat.

The second area in which our VPs lent their support was in providing intermediary support between individuals and their supervisors. There were some comments from members of our campus community that they were interested in participating but were concerned that they would be caught in a bind with their supervisors, that their normal work demands could not be compromised, and therefore that any self-study participation would have to be above and beyond their normal responsibilities. Again, our VPs provided support by communicating with all supervisors that the self-study effort was a college-wide priority; that participation was to be encouraged; and that duties should be shifted, as needed, to allow individuals to be a part of this process.

Final Comments

In conclusion, I encourage self-study coordinators to take advantage of all the opportunities for ideas that are available. If possible, have the Commission staff liaison meet with you and your steering committee; attend all Annual Meetings prior to your evaluation visit; seek out other institutions in your area that have had recent evaluation visits and ask for their perspectives on what they did that worked well and what they would do differently; and find out if any Consultant-Evaluators are in your area and meet with them to gain insights on what they look for when visiting colleges.

Finally, remember that your self-study process is unique to your college. Consider the ideas gleaned from all sorts of resources, but remember to structure the process in a way that uniquely suits your college.

Contact Information

You can access any of our college's self-study documents at our college Web site. Go to www.ppcc.cccoes.edu/selfstudy. A description of the documents available to you at this site is provided. Please feel free to download, print, and adapt any of them for your use. If you have any questions, contact me at Gayle.Krzemien@ppcc.cccoes.edu.

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From Contentment to Chaos to Competence: Confessions of a Self-Study Coordinator

Carol Nelson
Guy Aylward

Every accreditation-seeking college must someday experience the highs and lows of guiding institutional stakeholders through the arduous process of preparing the feared self-study. And every formerly cool, calm, and collected educator chosen to be the new self-study coordinator (congratulations, by the way) will sooner or later experience the dark dread and impending doom that inevitably begin to occupy the thoughts and feelings of all new self-study coordinators. We have chosen to deem this *Self-Study Coordinatoritus,* a condition that, while not known to be contagious, tends to strike all new self-study coordinators in the first few months of the process.

All hope is not lost. The up side is that those who have come before you have paved your way by encountering practically every conceivable self-study pitfall and making nearly every possible self-study mistake. The down side is that, of all of those hundreds of pitfalls and mistakes, very few have been eliminated or resolved for all eternity and for every situation. While the dangers of pitfalls have been mitigated and the opportunity for mistakes reduced, evil lurks everywhere in self-study land, and no coordinator (especially a first-time coordinator) is ever totally safe.

The scope and breadth of this paper will not allow for a complete overview of every possible pitfall and mistake that may be encountered. Rather, we attempt only to address the very common hurdles upon which new (and experienced) coordinators often stumble.

Contentment: The Perils of a Successful Past Accreditation

Arguably, the greatest error a school can make along the path to self-study success is to wait too long to begin the process. Ideally, the process should never end. Here is the dilemma. A school receives a ten-year accreditation in 2002. Everybody celebrates the great victory. The president tells the coordinator what a great job he or she did and promptly reassigns him or her to whatever teaching or other position that was previously held. The administrators take a deep breath and return to busying themselves with the daily operations of the school, while the faculty members continue to provide learning opportunities for the students. Everybody falls back into the old groove.

Taking a deep breath and giving themselves a chance to appreciate good work is just fine, as long as the victory dance doesn't last too long. Although our fictitious institution of higher learning received the full ten-year accreditation without a focused visit, not so likely these days, there are still going to be numerous concerns noted by the evaluation team. The best time to begin to address these concerns is right now. Unfortunately, the award of a nice long period of accreditation can lead to an equally long sense of contentment. If this period of contentment goes untreated, it can lead to complacency.

In most adaptations of this scenario, colleges will assign a certain contingent of individuals to address the concerns. For example, in a school with 1,000 employees, it may be that concerns are addressed via the eight or ten people assigned to the project or projects, while the other 990 individuals begin to head toward complacency. The pitfall in this scenario is obvious—complacency is no way to run a school. The majority of employees are allowed to forget about accreditation until eight years down the road, when it once again sweeps over the institution like an ominous storm cloud.

The cure is not so simple. Arresting the contentment requires strong administrative support, reasonable faculty/staff buy-in, and enough human and financial resources to keep the focus tuned up for the masses. And, if that is not frightening enough, remember that everybody will be expecting the new coordinator to know everything, do everything, and be perfect every time. So, where do we start?

Find a Mentor!

The new coordinator should make it a point to attend the NCA Annual Meeting at the earliest possible opportunity following appointment. The coordinator should go directly to the Resource Room and stop at the first self-study completed by an institution similar to his or hers. Once there, study the report and move onto the next study, and so on. Go to all of the workshops and learn about the process itself. Mingle, meet others, and ask lots of questions. At the end of the meeting, the coordinator will have a good idea about whom to ask to be a mentor through the process. Don't be shy. We were all new once. Now, go home and set a meeting with the president and the administrative liaison.

Administrative Support

Every self-study coordinator needs a strong administrative liaison. This individual should report directly to the president and must have the respect of faculty, staff, and administration. As you will learn, the transfer of authority from this administrator to the coordinator is sometimes the only leverage for getting things done in a timely and acceptable manner. Consequently, one of the most important factors in assuring a successful process may well be the garnering of strong, overt support from the president and vested authority from the top administrator who is the liaison. When the president is enthusiastic about and dedicated to the process, that attitude will generally cascade to the majority of employees.

Steering Committee

The steering committee should be developed as a result of careful consideration of qualifications and expectations. The most commonly noted qualities for membership on the steering committee are strong leadership and teamwork skills, positive attitude, effective problem-solving ability, effective communication skills, and peer respect. However, even in cases when one is able to build the perfect team of individuals, one issue may arise with this group—scheduling common meeting times. Therefore, setting up an effective communications system is the key to making the potentially effective steering committee truly effective.

Subcommittees

Depending upon which model is chosen to set up the self-study, subcommittees will need to be developed. Many schools use the *criteria model* in which they establish subcommittees around the Commission criteria. Other schools might choose from models that are more departmentalized to college functions. Either way, in our experience, we found that certain committees tended to be very popular with certain groups, while other committees were not popular with any group. Consequently, there is a need to ask volunteers to provide a committee *wish list* with their top three choices. The steering committee can then decide the best method for diversifying the committees.

Chaos Begins

As will be quickly learned, many subcommittee volunteers are not motivated as much by altruism as they are by agenda. Therefore, all subcommittees will require a great deal of guidance as to the exact nature of their charges and expectations. Each subcommittee should have a steering committee liaison. The liaisons should clearly understand the nature and purpose of the self-study and of the subcommittees to which they have been assigned. Additionally, the self-study coordinator and the administrative liaison should attend at least one early meeting of each subcommittee to respond to questions and provide further clarification of purpose and roles. Another way to provide guidance to committees is to prepare a written charge with task lists for each committee. The coordinator should discuss these charges in detail with the members of each committee.

So Many Agendas, So Little Time

In the first meeting of many subcommittees, you will find that certain members have not considered the nature of their work, but have merely assumed that because of the title of the subcommittee, they will have the opportunity to push their agendas through. Imagine a finance subcommittee in which several members believe that their departments are funded at a less-fair rate than are other departments. Consider a committee on governance in which certain faculty members are convinced that all administrators are evil and corrupt. Think about the member of the subcommittee on human resources who is convinced that her or his department needs additional hires more than all of the other departments. Everybody has an agenda whether they realize it or not. Total objectivity is an oxymoron.

Just the Facts, Please

Never forget that people believe that rumors are facts and assume that anecdotes equal data. Somebody will want to attribute merit to any rumor or anecdote that is not too far-fetched. Data, not supposition or agenda, must guide the self-study process. Therefore, if the institution does not currently have a data book, now might be the time to get to work on one. Since most institutions have Institutional Research offices, the gathering of much of the data is already done. All that is left is to have the data distilled into meaningful information and compiled into a user-friendly format with sections that match the subcommittee charges.

I've Already Made Up My Mind. Please Don't Try to Change It with Facts

An unfortunate side-effect of the data-driven self-study process is that of turning agenda-driven Dr. Jeckels into data-driven Mr. Hydes. As the subcommittee members review their charges and consider the available data, they may find that the data do not support their beliefs. This can result in a serious case of cognitive dissonance. Dismissing the data and finding a way to develop new data is the way that most committees want to resolve this dissonance. Therefore, anticipate that many subcommittees will insist upon surveying multiple constituencies in the hope that they will prove their positions. This must be nipped in the bud. Allow only one survey per constituency, and ask each subcommittee to submit a list of items that they would like included. Eliminate duplicates and develop as reasonable a survey as possible from the items gathered. Survey administration, data entry, and analysis are time-consuming, and the results will not be largely different than what is already available.

Competence

Finally, once all the committees are working, the coordinator should look ahead to the writing of the actual report. He or she should feel confident that the material provided will help in preparing an accurate report. Things will go smoothly if the coordinator continues to guide the committees in preparing their individual reports by providing a style sheet, setting up periodic meetings with committee chairs for updates, and monitoring worksheets prepared by the committees. Hopefully, these activities will prevent any surprises at the end. The coordinator should rely upon the steering committee as much as possible; remember to delegate. Once all the above are in effect, the coordinator will feel competent and organized and ready to prepare a Self-Study Report and Resource Room for the visiting Commission team.

The Rest of the Story

In the final outcome, every institution has a liaison provided by the Commission. These are experienced, dedicated persons who are there to offer guidance and help coordinators avoid the big pitfalls. The smaller potholes, brick walls, and pitfalls are generally experiential in nature. Some would say that making mistakes and learning from them helps to build character. We would simply say that at this point in our careers, we do not need to build too much more character. Therefore, let us all work together to create successful, not so terrifying, self-study processes.

No coordinator is immune to the dreaded *Self-Study Coordinatritus,* but we can at least be there to provide support, condolences, and advice to one another when the affliction strikes. Remember, no coordinator is alone in the affliction, and there is a vast support network out there waiting to hear from others like themselves. Take advantage of that network, use the phone and e-mail, gather other reports, and seek a mentor. While there is no known cure for *Self-Study Coordinatoritus,* there is treatment. Take advantage of it.

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Make Your Self-Study Process Meaningful and Engaging

Gloria Dohman

The self-study process is a great communication vehicle. If properly planned, it can involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders and inform a large audience. Chapter 5 of the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation* provides invaluable information about the process of self-study. The college leadership and whoever is appointed as self-study coordinator should become very familiar with its contents. Those institutions that regularly send administrators and faculty to the Annual Meeting are continually kept up-to-date about new expectations of The Higher Learning Commission. For many of these institutions, the self-study becomes an extension of what they are already doing.

The institutions that will profit the most are those that can make the self-study fit their situation and can customize it to their culture. The closer that the self-study can be aligned to the culture of the institution, the greater the opportunity that the processes put in place can be sustainable once the team visit is completed. Planning to plan and the planning itself are critical to the success of the self-study.

The support of the president or chief academic officer (CAO) is critical throughout the process. Often, the responsibility for the accreditation process is given to the CAO, who can be more closely involved with the process. Who should be the self-study coordinator is a critical decision. This position is responsible for the overall coordination and preparation of the report. The person appointed should be a good communicator, have excellent writing skills, be organized, be well respected, and know the campus and how it works. A job description should be developed that clearly spells out the roles and responsibilities of the position.

The steering committee members assist the self-study coordinator, help develop the plan, communicate progress of the self-study, and help prepare the report. These individuals should also be good communicators and be well respected. The steering committee should represent the diverse areas of the campus with representation that includes new employees, those with longevity, faculty, support staff, and administrators. The self-study coordinator in coordination with the president or CAO should develop a job description for the steering committee so that its duties are clearly understood.

The importance of investing time in a good plan for the self-study cannot be underestimated. Too often we plunge into a new endeavor without adequate planning and make unnecessary errors and omissions. The Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle provides a good planning model to follow and helps to ensure that steps will not be omitted. Many times we get caught up in the "Do" cycle and pay little attention to the other three steps.

Plan

☐ **Identify Mission**

Identify the purpose of the self-study. To meet the Commission's expectations, the self-study should document how well the institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation as well as the institution's plans for improvement. Beyond these expectations, the institution should determine what objectives they want the self-study to accomplish. This is often a good vehicle to get issues out in the open and plan effective strategies for improvement. The crucial point is to determine how the self-study becomes a meaningful document that is used strategically for planning future improvements and is not put on the shelf following the accreditation process.

☐ **Identify Internal and External Stakeholders**

Identify the people who need to be involved and informed and how they will be kept apprised of the progress being made in the self-study process. It is important to involve as many people as possible and that everyone is aware of the process and how it will evolve. Discuss how the community fits into the entire accreditation process and how they can become involved and provide input. Communication is essential to a successful self-study. A regular communication schedule should be established.

☐ **Access the Current Situation**

Review the last comprehensive evaluation report. This will give you perspective on how much progress the institution has made since the last site visit. How the concerns have been addressed and your analysis of how well the changes are working must be included in the Self-Study Report. This is the point where familiarization with the Requirements and Criteria will be particularly useful.

An examination of the culture of the institution will help determine how the structure and processes that are currently in place can be built upon to achieve the objectives of the self-study and if any new committees need to be added. A whole new layer of committees need not be established. In fact, if a process can be established that complements the campus culture and organizational structure, it will reinforce the importance of the data collection and analysis that has already been taking place. Ongoing strategic planning, annual reports of committees such as assessment and institutional effectiveness, and reports to system offices or other professional agencies are usually excellent sources of information. Determine what existing committees can be given assignments to supply data, analysis, and recommendations for change. This reinforces the concept that the work and reports they have been doing on campus to support day-to-day life is useful and important.

☐ **Identify Directions to Move Forward**

Identify the responsibilities of the individual steering committee members. Perhaps they could act as liaisons to the campus committees to provide advice and assistance. Discuss the format for the return of information from the committees. Preferably, a blank form should be provided, with specific questions to be answered and directions for online submission with the type of software to use, margins, type, etc. Develop a meeting schedule for the steering committee with due dates.

☐ **Evaluate Ideas to Find the Best Ones to Pursue**

Input from the campus should be encouraged. Determine if all the bases have been covered. Do the plans of the steering committee meet with the CEO and CAO's approval? Do they have any suggestions for improvement? Review the committee assignments and due dates. Be realistic in your expectations, and allow plenty of time for the writer to compile the information and prepare the report. Give the committees examples of evaluative rather than descriptive comments. Discuss how students will be involved. Their input is important, and they should be involved in the committees providing data and analysis. They also need to be aware of the purpose of the accreditation visit and the importance of accreditation to them.

☐ **Develop a Plan to Implement the Best Directions**

Develop a realistic timeline. Hopefully, you have begun this process early enough so that you have at least two to two-and-one-half years to complete the project. Use Chapter 10 of the *Handbook* as a guide. Working backward from the date of the expected site visit, set expected dates for completion of specific tasks. As a helpful hint, allow plenty of time to compile the information that is being submitted and write the report. It is also useful to have an editor in addition to the writer of the self-study. Often the self-study coordinator is the major writer, and a member of the steering committee serves as editor. It is very important for the self-study to be well written because it is the foundation upon which the peer evaluation is based. The printing process will also take more time than you think, especially the layout, proofing, and such details as cover, chapter dividers, pictures, and type of paper. A copy of your plan should be submitted to the institution's Higher Learning Commission staff liaison.

Do

☐ **Implement the Plan**

Inform the campus of the process and the timeline. Meet with the committees and make sure they understand their assignments and the due date. If you have assigned a liaison from the steering committee, this is the person they should contact with questions. Regularly attend their meetings and review their progress. Keep the self-study coordinator informed of the progress. This is a time when the steering committee should be very involved with the campus and help keep things focused and moving according to schedule.

Check

☐ Establish Intervals and Methods to Check on Progress of the Plan

The steering committee has established a regular meeting schedule. The steering committee members should be prepared to give progress reports on their areas of responsibility. Do the data and analysis that are being submitted meet the needs of the report? If not, what additional data need to be collected? At this time, the timeline should be examined to determine whether the self-study plan is on schedule or if adjustments need to be made.

Act

☐ Make Changes that are Needed to More Closely Achieve the Initial Goals

Make any schedule adjustments that are necessary. The steering committee should review drafts of the report as it is written. It should be analyzed particularly for content, not grammar and punctuation. Is all the necessary information included? Is the report evaluative, not descriptive? Institutions tend to think they are unique and spend unnecessary time describing their particular situation in detail. Most institutions have more in common that one would think, and Consultant-Evaluators appreciate a succinct, well-written report. If an area in the report is unclear, they will ask questions to clarify.

If necessary, determine how additional data will be gathered, by whom, and when. It is very important to adhere to the timeline. Consultant-Evaluators are very appreciative of materials that are submitted to them six to eight weeks prior to the scheduled visit so that they have plenty of time to review them.

As you can see, the planning process takes a great deal of time and thought. If properly done, it will results in a Self-Study Report that the entire campus will be proud to present as an accurate picture of the institution, its goals, its achievements, and its future direction.

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An Innovative Self-Study: A Systems Model Using Shared Governance

Karin Billions
Colleen Teague
Phyllis Wiebe

Introduction

Wayne College initially started its self-study two-and-one-half years prior to the Commission site visit. After a false start concentrating only on the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation, campus representatives attended the NCA Annual Meeting and were encouraged by several institutional presenters and Commission staff to try a different approach. The result was a self-study based on the Wayne College governance committees' analysis of critical systems and subsequent vision for the future. The college had its site visit in April 2001, and its approach to the self-study was well received. Wayne College was subsequently granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years.

Background

Wayne College is a public regional campus of The University of Akron and is separately accredited from its parent campus. It offers the first two years of general bachelor's degree classes, selected baccalaureate programs in cooperation with partner colleges in the university, certificates and associate degree technical programs, and continuing education and workforce development instruction. It serves almost 2,000 credit students and approximately the same number of noncredit students.

A major strength of Wayne College is its shared governance/leadership system, which permits meaningful participation by all stakeholders–faculty, staff, administration, contract professionals, students, and community members. Using its own shared governance system, the college makes decisions on its day-to-day operations and engages in short- and long-term planning.

Organization and Design of the Self-Study

☐ Utilizing Existing Governance Committees

Wayne College decided to challenge itself to organize a self-assessment that would meet the needs of the college as well as the requirements of the Commission. Several colleagues had concerns that productivity of the college's strong shared-governance structure would be curtailed for several years as it turned its focus to the self-study process. With this in mind, the college's NCA Planning Committee set out to review nontraditional models and construct a design that would provide the institution with maximum benefits while capitalizing on the organizational strength of its governance.

The NCA Planning Committee also decided to establish only one new committee, the NCA Steering Committee. The role of each steering committee member was to represent and serve as a liaison to at least one of Wayne College's governing committees currently in place. The members of the steering committee also provided leadership and support to individual governance committees in reviewing the institution's mission and goals, completing a SWOT analysis, gathering information, and developing a vision for the future. One of the many advantages of this approach is that the governance committees will be the very ones to carry forward the vision for the future.

A major objective of the study was to use the Commission's evaluation process as more than a status assessment. Instead, it served as an opportunity to engage all stakeholders to provide a shared vision to lead the institution in the next two decades. The self-study process also provided a method to define excellence and generated the motivation and enthusiasm to achieve it. The theme, "Wayne College 2020: A Shared Vision of Excellence," communicated this message.

The Process

The self-study was first organized by the identification of its critical systems and processes as well as relevant governance committees and departments (see note at end of paper). Utilizing this structure for the self-study, each committee and department was then asked to engage in the following activities:

- *Review and revise mission, charge, and goal statements from each department or committee in the system*—the goals being used as an answer to Commission Criterion One-A on long- and short-range goals. These statements allowed each system to identify and benchmark its role in the shared governance system.
- *Perform a SWOT analysis.* SWOT is the acronym describing a detailed organizational analysis by classifying the information into four categories: strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). From this information, committees and departments developed action plans that also served as input for the new strategic plan.
- *Respond to appropriate Commission criteria.* The co-chairs developed a matrix that identified the criteria within the purview of each committee and department. Some questions were answered by only one group, while most approached the criteria from many different critical systems. For each claim made, the committee or department was asked to supply appropriate evidence to support the claim. This became the basis for the documentation.
- *Develop a vision.* The final stage of the self-study process invited committees and departments to answer a set of ten questions to look at the present and consider the future so that the college might set forth a vision for the next twenty years. This information was compiled by the planning subcommittee and distributed to the entire college for review and approval. What resulted were the beliefs and values that were affirmed by the college, the college's overall vision statement, "component" vision statements, and the vision statements of the administrative and governance entities. It answered a call to excellence and provided a glimpse into a future that continues Wayne College's commitment to students and the community.

What Was Gained

The result of this process and organization was a dynamic, easy-to-read Self-Study Report. In addition, the self-study process provided an opportunity for reflection that will guide Wayne College into the next two decades. It provided the impetus to redesign the strategic plan and to embrace a more formalized continuous improvement plan. Furthermore, this uniquely designed review process now serves as a catalyst for Wayne College excellence.

Communication Strategies

Early in the study it became apparent that disconnects in Wayne College's communication system hindered distribution of information throughout the college. One of the first decisions made was to address the immediate problem of data collection for the study and to simultaneously explore methods of improving the general communication system. Review of the information gathered during the "false start" stage revealed that colleagues did in fact know what Wayne College's problems were but not what steps, if any, were being taken to solve them. The executive committee (consisting of the two faculty co-chairs, another faculty member serving as editor, the dean, the associate dean, and the college research analyst) began by developing the process described above. Three communication components required specific attention: audiences, channels, and messages.

☐ Audience Identification

To ensure that the self-study met the criteria set forth by the Commission, the first audience, all of the questions were assigned to appropriate Wayne College committees and departments. Some questions needed to be answered by all committees and departments.

A second audience addressed was Wayne College personnel (administration, faculty, staff, and students). Because a self-study requires exhaustive data-gathering over an extended time period, college personnel first needed to be informed of what was expected and then motivated to supply the information. This was accomplished in several ways. The Wayne College Self-Study Guide was developed. It included items such as an explanation of what the Commission expected, what Wayne College goals would be served by the study, how systems theory would be utilized for the analysis, samples of data-gathering forms and how to use them, and a style guide. This information was presented at a college meeting, and everyone was given a chance to ask questions or provide information. Informing students and gaining their input was accomplished by asking committees to include students in their membership and by asking the student senate to develop a method for gathering student feedback.

A third audience, the community served by Wayne College, was addressed by including a community leader as a member of the steering committee, by seeking advice from program advisory committees, and through surveys and focus groups.

☐ Channel Selection

To facilitate information sharing, and to reduce the workload for everyone as much as possible, the following techniques were used:

- Each department and committee was asked to include an "NCA Update" at each meeting. Because the data-gathering had been divided into stages, each committee could identify where it was in the process and what was yet to come.
- Each committee also developed a notebook to provide immediate access to information gathered so that data could be analyzed and used during the process.
- A frequently updated chart of data gathered was posted in the faculty/staff lunchroom.
- Each committee published its meeting minutes.
- Oral reports at faculty and college meetings reminded everyone of goals and objectives accomplished.
- Special techniques, such as the SWOT analyses described above, required participants to focus on the areas for which they had responsibility and expertise. (Facilitators were provided to any committee that asked for help. This was especially useful in committees experiencing internal conflict, where problem identification needed to be separated from blaming.)
- Surveys (of students, graduates, area businesses, and community members) provided both statistics and anecdotal information.
- Information collected was posted electronically on a dedicated computer drive during the last year of the self-study.
- Finally, a symbolic channel of information dispersal was developed, utilizing images of a bespectacled Holstein cow and the self-study slogan, "Wayne College 2020: A Shared Vision of Excellence."

☐ Message Design

The most significant part of the self-study was meeting the Commission's criteria and documenting that accomplishment. This was accomplished by the executive committee reviewing the criteria, multiple samples of self-studies from the Annual Meeting Resource Room, quality initiatives in business and in academia, and by committee members dedicating themselves to developing the best possible plan for Wayne College. This research was then synthesized into a variety of documents distributed to the college.

It was also necessary to provide other types of messages. These included information updates, motivational strategies, and strategies for sharing information among the various constituents. The co-chairs most frequently provided the information updates. Motivational messages most often came from the administrative team.

Sharing information took many forms. Some information sharing became uncomfortable, as when a committee discovered that it was working on the same agenda item as another committee, but with different goals. Ultimately such conflicts proved to be a good thing because they forced the college to recognize that human energy and material resources could be better utilized through better coordination. Consequently, several initiatives are currently underway to improve system-wide information sharing.

Documentation

☐ Maintaining a Systems Approach

Once the systems organization of the college's accreditation effort was established, the process of gathering documentation to address the Commission's criteria fell into place. At the outset, various people were involved in collecting materials, but it soon became apparent that one person should be in charge of this task for the sake of consistency and organization. A senior administrative assistant from the dean's office took on the responsibility, and she housed all the collected materials in her office. That choice proved advantageous for another reason. While some colleagues were punctual in providing requested materials, others were not. However, when the requests for information started coming from the dean's office, the response rate improved dramatically.

The college organized documents into a series of separate notebooks. SWOT analyses completed by each system were joined in one, all GIR documents were joined in another, and assessment documents were kept in still another. Each system or committee also maintained a notebook containing all meeting agendas and minutes, policies, and materials created by that committee. Committee chairs were responsible for both maintaining these notebooks and ensuring that they were delivered to the dean's office prior to the evaluation team visit.

☐ Organizing the Documents

Perhaps most important, all documents answering specific criteria were maintained in another set of notebooks, organized around the shared governance matrix established at the outset of the re-accreditation process. Thus, there was a separate notebook for the technology system, the facilities system, etc. The college took a broad definition of "documents" when collecting materials for these notebooks. For example, the enrollment management and student services notebook included surveys, a viewbook, flyers, letters and memos, posters, and countless policies relating to that system. The common denominator was ensuring that these materials served as support for answering the criteria. While selected passages from many of these documents were included in the Self-Study Report, the complete set of materials allowed site team members to seek out further proof when they felt it necessary. Each of the notebooks included a comprehensive table of contents to help readers selectively read among the contents.

Prior to the site visit, the documents room was organized for easy access to the notebooks. All notebook spines were clearly labeled and alphabetized as well as color-coded. A Team Visit Guide provided a single reference to all materials in the room. The entire site visit team commended the college on its documentation process, and the college remains committed to maintaining these notebooks for future accreditation efforts and as a way to centralize vital college documents often sought for day-to-day operations within the institution.

Conclusion

Wayne College's self-study experience was not only positive but also practical. Having begun the development of a vision statement prior to the self-study, the college tailored the Commission's requirements to provide information to facilitate an action agenda for the college for the next twenty years. Information gathering provided a database for analysis. SWOT analyses helped identify values important to all members of the college community. The formation of a steering committee, including a community leader, helped the college assess the level of its service to the community and identify additional service needs. Because each college committee's action plans were tied to analysis of its own challenges and accomplishments, committee members became stakeholders in the pursuit of excellence that the self-study engendered. As the college-wide vision was developed, committees became aware of the ripple effect one committee's decision could have on the work of another committee. Wayne College began the self-study believing not only that the college is a good place, but also that it is becoming an excellent institution. Data gathered and analyzed for this self-study support this conclusion.

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Appendix

An Innovative Self-Study: A Systems Model Using Shared-Governance

Critical Systems	**Wayne College Committees** (Governance System)	**Wayne College Departments**	**Critical Processes**
Leadership & Advancement System	Community Council	Administrative Team	• Promotes College shared governance, decision-making • Promotes College mission, vision and values • Develops policy • Develops resources • Develops business, community, and government relationships • Raises funds
Strategic Planning & Budgeting System	SPBC - Planning, Governance, Budget	Administrative Team, Business Operations and Finance, Bookstore	• Sets the College's direction; mission, vision and values statement • Defines institutional goals • Develops budgets • Provides budgeting and accounting processes • Collects fees • Manages risk • Establishes and reviews operational plans • Implements critical processes • Oversees purchasing and warehousing • Supervises auxiliary services (Bookstore, Word Processing, Food Services)
Communication and Information System	Marketing Committee	Research Analyst, Word Processing, Assistant to the Dean	• Operates information systems • Provides College-wide information and communication • Conducts institutional research • Produces and disseminates information about College: brochures, mailers, advertisements
Academic Affairs/ Student Learning System	Academic Affairs Committee FWBRR, FDC	Office of Academic Affairs, Library, Learning Center, Faculty	• Designs curriculum • Manages and articulates curriculum • Delivers instruction for developmental and credit courses • Develops educational partnerships • Manages Library and Learning Center • Oversees adjunct faculty
Academic Assessment System	Academic Assessment Committee	Faculty, Research Analyst, Learning Center, Library	• Gathers, analyzes, and interprets data • Revises assessment plan • Coordinates assessment activities and training • Provides assessment forms and Web presence • Serves as liaison to Akron campus
Enrollment Mgmt. Student Services System	Enrollment Mgmt. Committee Student Senate	Student Services, Financial Aid, Student Organizations, Career Services	• Oversees recruiting and enrollment • Assesses, orients, advises, counsels students • Supervises Student Senate and student organizations • Facilitates graduation and transfer functions • Provides financial aid and career counseling • Oversees College sports programs
Community Outreach and Development System	Marketing and Technology Committees	Continuing Education, Workforce Development	• Provides continuing education and workforce development • Develops credit/non-credit course linkages • Seeks grant funding • Participates in statewide continuing education networks • Customizes training for business and industry
Facilities Mgmt. System	Facilities Committee	Campus Police, Maintenance	• Maintains facilities and grounds • Oversees planning, facilities construction, and renovation • Coordinates safety and emergency responses
Technology System	Technology Committee	Computing Services	• Develops and monitors Technology Plan • Provides College-wide technical support • Maintains College's Web presence • Manages technology upgrades

A Model and Chronology of a Self-Study Process

Paulette Popovich
Gary Bays
Jack Kristofco

Introduction

In the late 1990s, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, like peer accrediting organizations in other regions of the country, began exploring new options for institutions to engage in self-study for reaccreditation. Models based on the Malcolm Baldrige Educational criteria and other quality improvement frameworks were offered to institutions with the understanding that, with NCA approval, non-traditional approaches to the self-study process could be employed. Within this context, the University of Akron Wayne College began to develop a self-study process model that focused on the college's established shared governance structure. Through the use of this structure, all college personnel were meaningfully engaged in the self-study and in formulating the resulting shared vision for the future. This paper presents the development and implementation of this process model, including the functions of executive, steering, and other committees; project organization and timetables; self-study design; and engagement strategies.

Development of the Systems Model

The site team visit was scheduled for April 2001. In early fall of 1998, the executive committee was appointed and charged with exploring and proposing self-study process options. Membership was very carefully considered in order to build a skilled team. The committee consisted of three full-time faculty members, the dean, the associate dean, and the institutional research analyst. The selection of faculty to be co-chairs was based on creating a leadership team that could manage and advance the project; therefore, demonstrated organizational and communication skills were used as primary selection criteria. Expertise in communication was also important, as was the respect of colleagues across the college. Because of the importance of the self-study document itself, the third faculty member was selected for these criteria as well as expertise in technical report writing and publishing. The research analyst provided guidance for data collection and management. The executive committee met bi-weekly, kept minutes of all meetings, and reported progress at Wayne's regular monthly college meetings (part of the college's active governance system).

The executive committee members participated in the spring 1999 NCA Annual Meeting with clear, predetermined objectives and assignments for each member. The committee members made the most of the time spent in sessions and in team discussions after sessions, which proved to be very valuable to the progress of the process development. Establishing a goal of "making the most" of the self-study process was central to these early discussions.

It was during one of these post-session discussions that the executive committee agreed on a systems approach to conducting the self-study. The team identified three clear objectives for the self-study process: (1) it should not create new committee layers dedicated specifically to NCA work, but rather should use committee structures already in place in the college; (2) the process would launch a quality improvement initiative in the college that would continue after the self-study process was complete; and (3) key end-products of the process would be review of the college's strategic plan and establishing a "vision" for the college.

A strength of Wayne College is its shared governance/leadership system. The system of ten committees was established approximately five years earlier and was designed to provide meaningful participation by all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, administration, students, and community members. The structure allows full involvement in campus policy development, decision making, and strategic planning and budgeting. Governance committees include the following: Strategic Planning and Budgeting; Academic Affairs; Academic Assessment; Campus Facilities; Enrollment Management; Faculty Well-Being, Rights and Responsibilities (FWBRR); Marketing; Technology; Student Senate; and Community Council. Using this leadership system as a guide, the executive committee left Chicago with a plan.

Once the process model was established, a steering committee was named. The sixteen members of this group were representatives from each governance committee or administrative department. Monthly meetings of the steering committee included progress reports from each representative as well as the NCA executive committee. Group consensus regarding any modifications of the process were documented in published minutes, as were other steering committee decisions. All committees in the college included an "NCA update" from their steering committee representative as a standing item on meeting agendas throughout the self-study period.

Project Organization and Timeline

Resources to conduct the self-study were assessed and earmarked early in the process. The administration allocated a budget for self-study activities and the report itself the year prior to beginning the process. Each year during the study, the budget was assessed and reallocated to ensure the availability of sufficient resources. The conversion of a staff break room to an NCA workspace provided visibility and a central location for self-study meetings, clerical work, and materials.

The co-chairs created a self-study guide that was distributed to the entire college community. This document included the systems model and organization of the self-study process, deadlines, a style guide, and an initial outline for the report. Careful study of the sample timeline for the comprehensive evaluation process (Commission *Handbook of Accreditation*) provided the foundation for a detailed calendar. Input from the research analyst regarding time frames for survey preparation and data collection and analysis, and from the writing expert regarding editing and publishing timelines was critical to developing an accurate, feasible organizational plan and timeline. From that point, committees and administrative units conducted SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analyses, created mission and charge statements, and responded to specific Commission criteria, and undertook a "visioning" exercise for their areas. A bulletin board in the NCA workspace held a large chart listing projects and deadlines, with space to note completion. Any changes made during the project were reflected in calendar updates.

Analysis of the Commission's criteria in the context of the governance structure allowed the development of a set of "critical systems" and "critical processes" to articulate how work is accomplished at the college. Governance committees and administrative departments involved in each were then identified. Input from each of the groups identified the critical processes in a particular system. For example, the "academic affairs/student learning" critical system involved the academic affairs and FWBRR committees, and academic affairs, library, and learning center departments as well as the faculty. The processes of this critical system included curriculum design, instructional delivery, development of educational partnerships, and library/learning center administrative management. Eight other critical systems were identified and described. Building the self-study process on this structure would enable the governance committees and administrative departments to respond to pertinent Commission criteria and General Institutional Requirements, as well as to evaluate their own critical system and processes.

Self-Study Document Design

Once the systems approach was chosen as the means for conducting the self-study process, creating an outline for the Self-Study Report followed quickly. Instead of a traditional approach in which chapters follow the criteria (Chapter 1: Criterion One), the college's report focused on each component of the shared governance system (e.g., Chapter 10: Facilities Management System, Chapter 11: Technology System). All stakeholders within a particular system would then respond to criteria pertaining to them. Because of this non-traditional organization, each chapter also included a detailed description of the system and its mission, as well as a SWOT analysis completed by all stakeholders in the system.

Obviously, some criteria demanded input from every system in the college (Criterion 1A. *Long- and short-range institutional and education goals*) while others (Criterion 2L. *Management of financial resources to maximize the institution's capability to meet its purposes*) were posed to select groups (in the latter case, the Fiscal Management System). This method streamlined much of the information gathering process; only those with expertise in an area were asked to address specific criteria. The method also ensured that virtually everybody in the college had a hand in collecting and writing portions of the report.

The steering committee agreed that a single author should then take these collected materials and shape them into a rough draft of the Self-Study Report in order to create a single voice and a sense of continuity for the document. The author also developed a design format for the final report, including chapter outlines, design templates, and font and graphics choices. A part-time clerical assistant was also hired at this time to create files and input data.

As chapters were finished, they were posted to a college-wide network so every employee could review and critique the draft, again, virtually ensuring that every employee had input in the report. Finally, a small group of readers worked with the author to do final editing and proofreading before sending the report to the printer. In a sense, the report exudes a sense of the shared governance system at the college; everyone shared in creating and revising it.

Engagement

On a formal basis, every monthly college meeting agenda listed at least one NCA item. These included simple progress reports, formal presentations, and question-and-answer sessions. College meeting discussions ensured consistency and continuity in communication throughout the college and served as a foundation for the involvement of college members in committee work on the self-study.

In addition to college-wide engagement in the formal self-study process, a variety of informal activities provided team-building and *esprit de corps* along the way. A humorous "cow theme" for the self-study project was established that combined the college's rural setting with the self-study goal of creating a "shared vision for excellence." "Elsievision," the bovine mascot, could be seen over the course of the self-study in many forms, from small cow "tokens" distributed to everyone in the college, to notices and communications posted in the halls, and even a "kiss the cow" faculty-versus-students contest to collect money for a local charity. Annual year-end celebrations that marked progress on the self-study included a picnic and games, all with cow themes.

Lessons Learned

Although demanding, the self-study process does not have to be tedious. Planning and management proved to be a most valuable investment by the leadership team. In addition, several other lessons are worth noting.

- It is vital to establish *esprit de corps.* There are many formal and informal ways of engaging the college in the self-study process.
- Choose committee members with care. Consider skills, knowledge, and collegiality. This process is too important to spend time waging turf or personal battles.
- Expect to have false starts. Although we had initially envisioned our structure based on the Baldrige model, our shared governance structure proved to be a much more effective model for the self-study.
- Develop a system for monitoring progress, keeping minutes of meetings, and ensuring accountability.
- If possible, involve students throughout the process. At Wayne College, students served on every committee.
- Expect to have glitches in producing the document. Despite our best planning and efforts, we experienced problems with software, disks, and computer networks. Back up all of your documents in more than one place.
- Talk with experienced Consultant-Evaluators at peer institutions in your region. They can be invaluable readers and critics.
- Allow sufficient time to carry out all phases of the process. Discussion and planning at Wayne actually began in the fall of 1998, thirty months before the site visit.
- Take advantage of the self-study process to set in motion energy and activities that will last beyond the life of the reaccreditation event; make the most of this college-wide opportunity.
- Above all, have fun! The process can be stressful, so build in ways to alleviate the tension and laugh at yourselves.

Wayne College used the NCA review process as more than a status assessment. Instead, we designed it as an important opportunity to challenge ourselves to dream about who we can become and how we can get there. In essence, it served as a chance to define excellence and to motivate ourselves to achieve it.

The Wayne College community feels very positive about the experience we had together preparing for and participating in the self-study and site visit. Undeniably rigorous, the process provided productive, necessary dialogue among all college constituents, created a shared vision for the next twenty years, and galvanized our mission and the college's motto, "where the student comes first."

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Big Things Can Come in Small Packages: Getting the Campus Involved in the Self-Study Process of a Private Catholic College for Women

Mary Partusch
Catherine Dunn Whittinghill

Introduction

College of Saint Mary (CSM) recently completed the challenging experience of reaccreditation with The Higher Learning Commission. The self-study process began in March 1999, and the comprehensive team visit occurred in May 2001. The team recommended the continued accreditation of CSM, with its next comprehensive visit in 2010-2011.

At the beginning of the self-study process, members of the CSM community approached the process with mixed responses: fear of additional work; anxiety over the college's perceived weaknesses; general dread; or an assumption that it did not pertain to them, but was a committee's responsibility. However, through the self-study process, the CSM community came together through strengthened lines of communication and learned a great deal about itself, its mission, and how its mission is carried out in every area of the college in so many ways. The self-study process was not merely a burdensome obligation, but was an opportunity for the campus community to embrace its strengths, to identify its weaknesses, and to plan and assess areas for change and improvement.

Identifying Goals for the Self-Study Process

The major objectives of the College of Saint Mary self-study process were to gain continued accreditation for ten years and to analyze, document, and evaluate CSM's effectiveness in accomplishing its mission and purposes in the past, present, and future. A goal of ten years was of particular significance because CSM had a recent history of accreditation visits about every five years. In addition to these major objectives, the steering committee members and the CSM community identified the following goals:

- To strengthen communication and decision making processes across campus
- To attract and retain human resources, particularly students and staff
- To assess library technological functions and processes and to make recommendations to maintain the library as a center of excellence

Gathering Information and Organization of the Self-Study Report

The CSM self-study committee was charged with the task of data and information collection to complete the self-study process. The committee was composed of faculty, students, staff, and alumnae representing all of the academic and administrative units at CSM. Several key members of the community worked together in subcommittees to draft detailed and evaluative reports in response to the accreditation criteria. These initial drafts and all other information relating to the self-study were placed on the public "J" drive of the CSM computer network, allowing members of the CSM community open access to all materials related to the self-study process.

Once the majority of the data for the self-study was collected and submitted in draft form on the "J" drive, the writer of the Self-Study Report began the arduous the task of taming the mass of information into a concise and informative narrative of CSM's self-study process. As a first step in preparing for the writing process, the writer studied the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation* to determine what specific content was required to fulfill the outcomes of the report. Second, the writer examined samples of reports from several other institutions of similar size and resources to find a general form to follow. Third, the writer edited the material for consistent style and to avoid repetition of the same issues in several sections of the report. The writer and self-study coordinator then reviewed the document for any potential gaps in the data.

Individual Feedback and Focus Groups

Upon completion of the initial draft related to each criterion, it was sent through e-mail as a Word file attachment to members of the steering committee for review and recommendations. As the Self-Study Report was completed, drafts were placed on the network server accessible to members of the CSM community, with a printed copy on reserve in the library, and community input was solicited. Upon completion of the self-study draft report, the self-study coordinator prepared a series of PowerPoint presentations that identified components of a respective criterion and provided evaluative data about how CSM met that criterion. The steering committee was divided into pairs from different departments to communicate both the criterion and CSM evaluative data. The sections were disseminated to the CSM community, one at a time, through a series of scheduled focus groups with PowerPoint presentations. The steering committee received useful and extensive feedback about the drafts, and the suggestions were incorporated into the draft and strengthened the Self-Study Report. The coordinator also spent considerable time responding to issues, questions, and suggestions raised by the focus groups via e-mail that was sent to the entire CSM community. This process gave the entire college community the opportunity to learn about the self-study and to participate by providing specific input into the final report.

Once the complete draft of the report was compiled, it was placed on the network server, on reserve in the library, and e-mailed to steering committee members, academic and administrative units on campus, alumnae and students on the steering committee, and the CSM board of directors for review and comment. A draft was also sent to Dr. Cecilia López, CSM's Commission liaison.

Keeping the Campus Community Involved and Interested

Throughout the self-study process, the coordinator kept the CSM community informed about the progress of the steering committee through a series of e-mail messages and flyers posted around campus. Early in the self-study process, information about The Higher Learning Commission Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements were given initially at a faculty assembly, administrative meetings, board meetings, and student meetings through a series of PowerPoint presentations adapted to the respective audiences. These presentations were of particular importance because many long-term faculty and staff had not been involved in preparing previous self-studies: "it was a committee or administrative responsibility." Monthly updates at faculty meetings and staff meetings reinforced the information and importance of college community involvement. Two student representatives on the steering committee acted as liaisons with the student senate, keeping students informed and obtaining student feedback. Input was solicited from individuals as well as groups across campus. The steering committee members worked individually with their respective areas as well as collectively to communicate and meet the goals of the self-study process.

During the year of the accreditation visit, kick-off events were planned with faculty, staff, and students. One such event included a multiple-choice questionnaire related to the accreditation criteria completed by groups at respective tables, with prizes going to the those who scored the highest. The questionnaire provided humor as well as an assessment of community knowledge. This in turn was incorporated into the community updates. PowerPoint presentations in the year leading up to the self-study visit reinforced earlier information, clarified areas from the questionnaire assessment, and provided additional evaluative data about CSM.

In the month prior to the team visit, a series of mock visits were scheduled. For the mock visits, members of the steering committee volunteered to visit areas and departments of the college other than their own to ask questions that might be asked by evaluation team members. The questions were compiled from handouts obtained at self-study workshops and The Higher Learning Commission Web site. The mock visits served to boost community confidence as well as clarify any questions. Mock team visitors in turn gave the areas and departments positive feedback about their knowledge and helpfulness related to the accreditation process.

Celebration and Ongoing Commitment by the Campus Community

The Higher Learning Commission team recommended that CSM receive continued accreditation and that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled in ten years, with a monitoring report in four years. A celebration by the campus community was used as an opportunity to share the team's recommendations. Electronic means were used to share the team report. The ongoing process provides an avenue for continuing to strengthen CSM as a community and a college accredited by The Higher Learning Commission.

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Dynamic Duo: Designing a Collaborative Environment for a Successful Self-Study

Michele Dvorak
Alexandra Victor

How did a small college successfully secure a ten-year accreditation for the first time in its history? Without a doubt, the engagement of the entire institution in the process of the self-study resulted in the development of a culture committed to success. With hindsight and reflection, the co-chairs have analyzed the component factors in an effort to assist colleges with quality suggestions for a successful self-study. This paper focuses on three aspects of the self-study: team selection/team building, institutional engagement, and working within realistic timelines.

Team Identification/Leadership Selection

As Calumet College of St. Joseph (CCSJ) began to plan for its comprehensive self-study during the summer of 1999, the institution characterized the concept of transition. The president had just appointed two new vice presidents in the areas of academic affairs and enrollment management. As one might expect, these changes in leadership would affect the entire self-study process.

As a result of this transition, the president of the college implemented a co-chair structure for the self-study team, pairing the new vice president for academic and student affairs with the assistant to the president, a senior staff member whose experience included almost ten years with the institution.

The initial task assigned to the co-chairs appeared simple enough: put together a team representative of all areas of the college, diversified in talent, knowledge, and expertise, with a willingness to make an eighteen-month commitment to the self-study process. Simple enough, maybe.

Team Composition/Team Building

In September 1999 an eleven-member committee (including the co-chairs) was established and held its first meeting. To build confidence and a culture of interdependence, each member was asked to identify (1) educational background, (2) history with the college, (3) particular skills and talents, and (4) current roles within the institution. The skills, talents, and expertise were noted. In the process of sharing information, two consistent themes—dedication to the mission and success of the institution—emerged as well. With this particular team, the self-study was grounded by individuals who would not only complete the tasks at hand but also engage the entire institution in the process of the self-study. This self-study team would play an instrumental role in creating a dynamic and positive message.

As the team began its work in weekly meetings, particular challenges emerged. A lack of cooperation and apathy was evident on the part of constituents; two original team members resigned after understanding the breadth of the work involved and team expectations; and not all strata of the college were equally cooperative in this endeavor. The team was presented with challenges as well. In making decisions, the team used a consensus approach, but discussions about various issues and topics led to some bruised egos and hurt feelings, particularly when identifying weaknesses and challenges within a department or the college as a whole. The team discussed the effects of the challenges and identified possible solutions, keeping the vision on the goals of the self-study. As the timeline progressed, the team members began to feel more comfortable with each other, realizing the need for honest discussions rooted in the future of the college. Experiencing some success in team building activities that included a supportive environment, the team focused discussions on the need for complete engagement of the college community.

Institutional Engagement

As the self-study team analyzed the patterns of its discussions, members learned that a successful self-study required institutional engagement at every level. An effective strategy to develop this culture included collaboration across institutional strata. Responding to the challenge of the need for institutional engagement, the self-study team discussed various approaches for participation in the process. After review of the existing institutional structures, the self-study team realized that a number of vehicles for participation already existed. These included:

Structure	Meeting Times	Constituency	Number Involved
Board of Trustee Meetings	Six times a year	Broadly representative of the community	40
Board of Trustee Planning Seminar	Annually	Broadly representative of the community	25
Administrative Retreat	Biannually	Representative of every aspect of the college	30
Administrative Staff Meetings	Weekly	Representative of each vice presidential area	7
Faculty Meetings	Bimonthly	All faculty involved	25
Department Meetings	Weekly	Specific to each department	Varied
Focus Groups	Periodic	Students	Varied

The self-study team evaluated the existing meeting structure with an eye toward developing a culture of engagement. In addition to the institutional structures, the self-study team included two additional layers of institutional engagement: (1) attendance at the North Central Association Annual Meeting in Chicago, and (2) participation in monthly NCA Days. These events focused the college community on the goals of the self-study and engaged people in offering perceptions on various aspects of the self-study.

- **Attendance at the North Central Association Annual Meeting.** Because of the college's proximity to the Annual Meeting, beginning with the 1999 meeting the college increased the number of attendees. All full-time faculty and each vice president was invited to the 2000 Annual Meeting; twenty-nine representatives attended. Everyone returned with a better understanding of the process as well as professional information gathered from the Annual Meeting Resource Room. In addition, faculty were invited to sessions on assessment and general education.
- **NCA Days.** Beginning in September 2000, the self-study team designed and presented mandatory monthly seminars. Designed to include a potluck lunch, the meetings were scheduled for 11 A.M. The self-study team would present a specific topic approximately one hour in length (e.g., strengths or challenges of the college). At noon everyone participated in a potluck lunch and continued to discuss the topic. Ideas, perceptions, and comments were recorded, and after culling the information the self-study team incorporated or utilized the information as a basis for the self-study. Feedback on the process or the specific topic guided the self-study team in its plans for the next meeting. The process provided the self-study team with valuable information that extended beyond the perspectives generated from the core eleven-member team.
- **Utilizing existing structures.** Each team member represented a specific vice presidential area responsible for sharing updated information with colleagues on a continuous basis. An analysis of the existing structures required the assignment of at least one team member to each of the meetings. In this manner, each strata of the college was involved in data collection as well as data generation (i.e., every stratum dealt with generating solutions for identified challenges).
- **Administrative retreat.** The agendas for the board of trustees planning seminar and the biannual administrative retreat centered on the self-study process. Board members engaged in similar experiences as those designed for the college community through NCA Days. The self-study process, progress, and issues

or challenges that surfaced were presented for solution generation. These sessions proved quite helpful to the self-study team and furthered the goal of an engaged constituency.

Combined, these structures created a mechanism for an exchange between the self-study team and the college family. These activities resulted in a feeling of institutional engagement on campus. Due to the timing of the events, it allowed for almost continuous feedback as the team progressed through the self-study timeline.

Realistic Timelines

With approximately eighteen months to complete the self-study process, the team set a weekly meeting schedule and met for one-and-a-half to three hours per meeting. During the first few meetings, a timeline for institutional engagement and completion of duties was established. As it set the pace for the process, aligning the timeline in conjunction with scheduled meetings was integral to success. The schedule was shared with all constituencies early. Attention to the timeline was one of the most important functions of the team.

Writing the self-study presented the most challenges. The co-chairs assigned two team members to each of the five criteria for accreditation. The team members were asked to meet with other members of the college family to understand their functions within the institution as they related to the assigned criteria. The draft chapters were reviewed by the team while a faculty committee member worked on the narrative of the document.

After reviewing and editing the draft document several times as a team, it became evident that the final document needed to be refined by a smaller group. Four individuals were chosen, the two co-chairs and two other team members whose history with the institution covered five years. This small group reviewed the document from an institutional perspective. The final reviews were tedious and multiple, but yielded a document that the team and the institution found acceptable.

At most larger institutions, members of the steering committee receive some sort of release time or decrease in duties while they serve in this capacity. Calumet College of St. Joseph, with approximately one hundred full-time employees, was unable to afford this opportunity to its team members. As the team members became engaged in the process, however, their commitment to the institution and its mission grew. In the end, the team became a close-knit group, where friendships outside of the meetings blossomed, and a new appreciation of each other was evident.

Conclusions

In March 2001 the college was granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years and approval of a master's program, two firsts for the college. Upon reflection, it took a tremendous amount of work and coordination to accomplish the self-study. With a team that was dedicated to the institution and its mission, what appeared initially (and actually most of the way through the process) to be an insurmountable project was completed with a high level of success. A quality team coupled with institutional engagement rooted in realistic timelines prompted new opportunities for the college.

During the process, CCSJ learned the importance of celebrating small achievements along the way. As specific tasks within the timeline were completed, the team needed to step back, celebrate, and reflect not only the accomplishments but also the learning. Team celebrations could be as simple as serving a homemade pie at a weekly meeting.

With hindsight, we realize the cultural shift that occurred during the months of the most intensive work. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students were engaged in a discussion and feedback process that had never before taken place at CCSJ. The self-study afforded the college the opportunity to look at itself introspectively, learn from its challenges, and share in its strengths. With hindsight, one could view the self-study as a graced process. But then again, that perception would only be fully realized after the conclusion of a successful self-study.

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Conducting a Self-Study in Times of Change: It Can Be Done!

Judith C. Christensen
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Introduction and Background

When National-Louis University (NLU) submitted its self-study plan in 1999, the general feeling of the steering committee members was "this is like changing a tire on the expressway at rush hour." We considered requesting an extension of time, but after attending the NCA meeting in April, it became clear that we were not alone in our "culture of turmoil and change." The theme of this conference, "Engaging the Future: Vision, Values and Validation in the New Educational Marketplace," captures perfectly the many issues we faced during our self-study.

History of the Institution

NLU had its beginnings in 1886, in Chicago's Loop, as Elizabeth Harrison's school to train women as kindergarten teachers, later incorporated as the Chicago Kindergarten College. Harrison and her college were early advocates of the kindergarten movement, and of other reform movements as well, helping to spread progressive ideas about parenting and women's social roles as well as about early childhood education. In 1926, the school moved to the Chicago suburb of Evanston and in 1930, as National College of Education (NCE), became the first college in Illinois to require a bachelor's degree for teacher certification. In 1918, the college created a demonstration school (The Children's School, now Baker Demonstration School) and established one of the earliest nursery schools in the country at Jane Addams' Hull House. During the Second World War, the college helped create emergency nursery schools in the Chicago area, assisting working mothers with childcare while their husbands were at war or at work. Later, the college began offering teacher training to men as well as women, developed its first graduate programs, expanded coursework in the human services field, and was involved in the creation of Head Start.

From its beginnings to the present, the institution has taken a consistent approach in all its endeavors, eventually taking steps to link the liberal arts and sciences to professional preparation in a broadening range of fields. The approach has its foundation in a vision of service to society through a tradition of progressive education.

After 1970, NCE took its distinctive brand of education farther afield to meet the needs of new groups of students. In 1971, the institution acquired Pestalozzi/Froebel College and established a second campus, once again serving inner-city students in downtown Chicago. Extension courses begun in the 1950s led the way to adult degree-completion programs and in-service programs in the early 1970s. For the still-small college, necessity became the mother of diversification. NCE's enrollments dropped during the early 1970s as public education in the United States suffered cutbacks. As an institution whose financial well-being was almost totally dependent on enrollment, the college moved to expand its offerings and its student body both as a means of survival and as a way to strengthen quality—still, however, working in the spirit of reform and social betterment. We moved into bilingual teacher education and business education for immigrants. In 1976, we opened a third campus in Chicago's western suburbs (now Wheaton) and established our first adult degree-completion program—an accelerated program using experiential learning and a field-based delivery system.

By the 1980s, the college had begun a human services program, first at the undergraduate level, later at the graduate level. The Language Institute was established to help serve increasing populations of minority students, immigrants, and international students. Degree-completion programs for working practitioners in applied behavioral sciences and allied health drew on the established education and management programs. Programs in radiation therapy, respiratory therapy, and medical technology followed, and business programs expanded, now offering instruction in computer systems, accounting, marketing, finance, business law, management, supervision, and business organization. Doctoral programs were implemented in 1984. New academic centers outside of Illinois were established—in St. Louis, Missouri (1984); McLean, Virginia (1985); Tampa, Florida (1988); Milwaukee/Beloit, Wisconsin (1989); and Atlanta, Georgia (1989). Responding to a request from NCA, NLU began offering degrees for Department of Defense Dependent Schools' personnel in Germany in 1988. A fourth Chicago-area campus opened in Elgin in 1989. By the end of the 1980s, there were three schools (later called colleges)—Education, Arts and Sciences, and Management and Business.

In 1990, reflecting its evolution into an institution with an expanded mission and following a major gift from Michael W. Louis, the institution became National-Louis University. Enrollments, which had doubled each decade for three consecutive decades, were at an all-time high. (Fall term unduplicated headcounts were 1960–1024; 1970–2644; 1980–3953; 1990–7963.) The decade since has proven to be a time to catch our breath and take stock. The rapid growth in enrollments, programs, and sites ceased after 1990 (fall 2000 headcount–7619). Helped by advice from NCA teams in 1991 and 1995, we were already turning our attention to fundamental weaknesses in our infrastructure when we suffered a major financial crisis in 1995, an unanticipated $4.381 million shortfall.

During 1996-1997, the university's administration addressed the crisis with a range of financial responses that included an across-the-board budget reduction, a hiring and salary freeze, and a voluntary incentive separation program (VISP). These responses, however, tended to aggravate the already-existing infrastructure problems, and they did not solve the financial problems. In late 1997, the university's president resigned, along with most of his senior administration, and the board began a search for a new president.

A new administration took charge in August 1998 and gave careful attention to NLU's systems of organization, financial planning, record-keeping, technology, development, communications, assessment, marketing, and enrollment.

Organizing Ourselves for a Self-Study

When the president appointed the NCA self-study steering committee in December 1998, the challenge was to conduct a university-wide study in the midst of tremendous change within NLU. The steering committee adopted the phrase, "Respecting the Past–Anticipating the Future" as the theme for the self-study and began its work.

In January 1999, the committee developed a proposed timeline for the self-study, trying to incorporate several ongoing planning processes, accreditation efforts, and subcommittee structures. National College of Education was in the midst of accreditation reviews by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), so its work was especially applicable to the self-study. The College of Management and Business was preparing for an accreditation review with the International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education (IACBE). In addition, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) was working, with the help of several NLU subcommittees, on formulating new strategic initiatives for 2010.

After careful review and analysis of materials from the 1991 and 1995 NCA reports, the committee proposed the following set of purposes for the 2001 self-study:

- Use the revised institutional mission to help guide the self-study process.
- Integrate and inform long-range and strategic planning efforts.
- Involve a broad range of stakeholders in a collaborative study process.
- Analyze academic and operational units based on both the mission and output perspectives.
- Design and implement appropriate ongoing assessment strategies for academic and operational units.
- Seek a change in location on the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) to deliver for the first time at an international site a degree program for non-U.S. nationals in Poland.
- Write a self-study document that evaluates the NLU of 2001 and provides a basis for planning for NLU through 2011.
- Achieve continued accreditation by NCA.

After attending the April 1999 NCA Annual Meeting, the steering committee decided to organize by criteria and GIRs and share information among the committees when overlapping topics were addressed. Each steering committee member agreed to serve as liaison for one of the five criterion subcommittees. Throughout the summer of 1999, the criterion teams worked in small groups to develop questions, brainstorm resources, suggest possible membership, and refine the committee tasks.

To avoid multiple committee assignments, the chair of each criterion subcommittee met with the self-study coordinator to determine a list of faculty and administrative staff with appropriate expertise to serve on criterion subcommittees. John Taylor, our NCA liaison, attended the September 1999 kick-off meeting and presented an overview of the self-study process to more than a hundred committee members.

Keeping the University Community Involved

A winter meeting of all faculty and many staff was held in December 1999 and provided another opportunity to share with the entire NLU community and have face-to-face meetings of all committees. Dr. Taylor was invited to hear an update from each subcommittee and provide advice as needed. The Connection meeting also provided opportunities for faculty and staff work on such topics as assessment, general education, review of the new strategic plan initiatives, and more.

Subcommittees prepared progress reports, and these were compiled into the NCA 2001 Self-Study Progress Report (April 2000). The report was shared with all programs and units for review and planning for the future. Each subcommittee incorporated current change efforts into its report and recommendations for change.

In July, the board of trustees adopted the new strategic plan, including the revised mission and purposes, which had previously been approved by faculty senate and the university administration. All of these plans were then included, as appropriate, in the university catalogs for 2000–2002, published in fall 2000.

In August, the self-study committee established an NCA Web site (as part of the university Web site: www.nl.edu) in order to publicize the self-study to the university's publics. Also at this time, the university brought on board a new vice president for institutional research, who was to assist in preparing Basic Institutional Data forms and fact sheets. Revised vitae forms were distributed to all faculty for return in September. Also in September, the university president, provost, self-study chair, and NCA liaison had a preliminary meeting with the chair of the NCA visiting team.

Each NLU college held fall 2000 meetings that focused on assessment and assured development of unit assessment plans where these had not already been developed. Meanwhile, assembly of the Self-Study Report proceeded throughout the fall, with a first draft of the full report being completed at the end of November. This draft became available for review and comment at the beginning of December.

The self-study committee once again made a presentation to the university community at the Winter Connection on December 6, 2000. Following the presentation, faculty, administrators, and staff were asked to respond to a list of strengths and opportunities for improvement that had been developed for each criterion.

The Report and Team Visit

The results of the survey on strengths and opportunities for improvement were not surprising. It was encouraging to see that items relating to our mission and purposes were perceived as our greatest strengths. The core of our vision and purpose remained intact after a long period of change and upheaval. The greatest agreement about weaknesses came in the area of need for financial stability, getting new systems working smoothly, and support for the students. Not surprisingly, the visiting team agreed with these perceptions.

Our goal was to write a Self-Study Report that was honest, yet had a forward-looking focus on issues. We included the issues, challenges, and change efforts underway at NLU throughout the past ten years. The visiting team appreciated this straightforward approach and said in their report:

> The team found the self-study complete, penetrating and candid. Using the five criteria as the framework for the organization of the self-study, the university argued the case with evidence for having met each criterion. But within each it identified, as well, what it called "opportunities for improvement." The team's work was facilitated by such candor in the written document, and it found that the climate of openness continued in its conversations with individuals and groups throughout the NLU community. The result was team confidence in the self-study, and it expects that report to be a useful guide for the university during the next decade.

The team visit resulted in a recommendation for continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years and with monitoring reports on finances and general education.

Copies of the NLU Self-Study Report are available for $30.00 from Christine Turnbull at cturnbull@nl.edu.

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Organization and Planning: The Key to a Productive and Positive Final Year!

Marjorie J. Villani
Lucinda A. Mihelich

Introduction

The self-study process at Pueblo Community College (PCC) was a productive and positive learning experience that, in the end, was celebrated by the constituents involved in the self-study process. This success can be attributed to detailed organizing and planning from implementation through the final exit interview. Pueblo Community College completed the first two years of a challenging self-study process through organizing and planning multiple tasks that involved a large number of individuals. The final year of the process brought new challenges and presented tight deadlines that, in the end, would affect the on-site visit and the final team report. It required a well-organized plan for carrying out these tasks and, at the same time, required the self-study coordinators to be flexible and responsive to the concerns and needs of the self-study process.

During the final year, the key activities included:

(1) planning and coordinating the final stages of editing, reviewing, printing, and distributing the self-study document;

(2) planning and coordinating the logistics of the site team visit, including the development of the Resource Room; and

(3) informing internal and external constituents of the self-study findings and activities occurring during the final stages of the self-study process.

When the self-study coordinators began to prepare for the final year and identified these key activities, they both were concerned and somewhat overwhelmed by the complexity and importance of the tasks, the short time frame when the tasks were to be completed, and the challenge of making sure that each item was addressed and accomplished. Recognizing that the institution had already accomplished a lot and had made significant progress toward preparation for the last year, the self-study coordinators continued to apply the same principles to the last year as they did to their first two years of the self-study process: *planning, organizing, and keeping people informed of and involved in the process.* The following provides the reader with an idea of how Pueblo Community College addressed these final year activities, which are faced by any college going through a self-study process that culminates in an on-site visit.

Final Stages of Producing the Self-Study Document

☐ Editing and Reviewing

When Pueblo Community College began the self-study process, the campus community knew that the expectation was to produce a *self-study document that would clearly express the original findings and conclusions of the self-study committees and, at the same time, would be accurately written in a concise and readable format.* With this expectation as a framework, the campus easily embraced a process that included *wide-participation, real deadlines, and comprehensive editing.*

The self-study document chapters were written by the self-study committees that involved over 80 percent of the faculty and staff. During that time, the campus relied heavily on electronic communications to transmit written drafts, edit drafts, and provide feedback to the committees and to all campus personnel. Throughout the process, the self-study coordinators and steering committee members emphasized, to faculty and staff, that the self-study was being conducted by the committees and that, in the end, the content of the document would truly reflect the findings of the committees. The committees knew that they had two years to conduct the self-study process and to write their portions of the document with the assistance of the steering committee and the self-study coordinators. They also knew that the deadline for their final submission would signal the time when the self-study coordinators would begin the final editing stages that would include student editors and an outside editor. The self-study coordinators took approximately four months to complete this task and did so under a clearly identified timeline with strict deadlines placed upon themselves and others. It involved *constant communication with committees, a clear process for using electronic communications for rapid input and feedback, and a clear process for obtaining outside review and editing of the document.*

The student editors were Phi Theta Kappa members who volunteered to read individual chapters of the document. The value of this editing phase was evident when the student editors turned in their edits and identified factual and grammatical errors and omission of factual information that had not been identified by faculty and staff. They also identified areas that were not clear to the reader.

The college decided to utilize an outside editor who was familiar with higher education and who also had an English and/or technical writing background. This person was found in a retired English professor from the University of Southern Colorado. An added benefit to his knowledge base was that he also had experience in reading and writing documents prepared for accrediting agencies. Even though there was detailed and in-depth editing conducted by campus faculty and staff, the outside editor, with his higher education and accreditation experience, was able to objectively identify areas where the document needed more explanation or clarification for readers not familiar with the campus climate, history, and facts. He had an editorial style that required the writer to discuss the concept only once in the document. This pushed the self-study coordinators to decide where the items should be discussed in the document; and most important, this editorial style contributed to a concisely written document. The outside editor completed a final edit just prior to submission to the printer. All of these activities resulted in a document that was presented to campus personnel, community constituents, and the Consultant-Evaluators, who noted that the document was concise, easy to read, and comprehensive. *In retrospect, the introduction of the outside editor in the final stages made a significant impact on the quality of the document.*

☐ Printing the Document

Recognizing that a lot of work went into the content of the document, the self-study coordinators made a decision to approach the printing of the document with the following factors in mind: *(1) the content was presented in an easy-to-read, organized, and attractive format; (2) the document was easy to handle; and (3) the document was received by the team no later than six weeks prior to the date of the visit.* Again, this required careful planning and organization.

Because one of the self-study coordinators was an experienced Consultant-Evaluator (C-E) who had read various types of self-study documents, the Pueblo Community College document was formatted with some of her past experiences in mind. The self-study coordinators focused on formatting the document so that it could easily be handled and read by a C-E in an office, on the airplane, and in a motel room, which are places where C-Es often read the documents. Rather than using three-ring binders, which are not easy to pack or to read on an airplane, the PCC document was printed in a spiral binding format that was not more than two inches thick. The document was formatted so the Consultant-Evaluators would have space to write notes on individual pages. Rather than direct the reader to the appendices for charts and graphs, it was decided to place charts and graphs in the document where the chart or graph was discussed. The appendices were used to supplement critical information in the document, and the appendices were not lengthy. This process included many discussions with the printing company, cover designer, and campus personnel; and it required tasks to be completed in sequential order.

During the final editing stages, the self-study coordinators worked with the printing company to develop a detailed process and timeline for printing the document. The absolute deadline for receiving ten bound copies of the document (six for the team, one for the Commission liaison, and three for the campus) was the deadline set for mailing the document to the Consultant-Evaluators and the liaison. The self-study coordinators valued and readily utilized current word processing capabilities and the current state-of-the art printers to establish a process whereby the college had complete control of the development and layout of the document that would be presented to the printer in a camera-ready format. This allowed the self-study coordinators to experiment with layout, headings, and font size. It provided a process where final edits could be completed on an ongoing basis, and charts, graphs, and text could be updated with recent data, particularly in regards to budget and enrollment data. An additional benefit was the ability for the self-study coordinators to have total editing control and to make last minute and critical editing changes without having to work within the confines of a printing company's schedule.

The final phases of editing and printing the document can present some challenges. Because of this, *self-study coordinators are urged to take steps to think through the requirements of the final phase, to clearly organize these steps, and to clearly identify timelines.* Every college needs to identify the best way to get this accomplished so that the self-study coordinators have control over the process and, in the end, the institution prints a self-study document that is clear, concise, and easy to read. Equally important is taking steps to assure that the document is received by the Consultant-Evaluator team in a timely manner.

Logistics of the Team Visit and Resource Room

In preparing for the on-site visit, the Pueblo Community College self-study coordinators operated from the premise that *the team would be conducting a significant amount of work and absorbing volumes of information in a very short time period. Because of this, it was important to assure that the team had accommodations, services, and information readily available.* The success of the team visit required careful planning and detailed organization. Because one of the PCC self-study coordinators is an experienced Consultant-Evaluator, the college had access to valuable information about what to do and what not to do to prepare for a visit. For a college that does not have a C-E on its staff, it is important to seek advice from other colleges that have completed an on-site visit, from the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation*, and from other Consultant-Evaluators.

☐ Team Visit

The first order of business for preparing for the actual visit was to select a hotel that provided services and was easily accessible. The selected hotel catered to business travelers and had computers, printers, fax and modem connections in the room, and a continental breakfast service. The hotel also had a conference room that could be used and secured by the team during the visit. The hotel was also selected because there were restaurants within walking distance to accommodate team members who did not have transportation.

The Team Chair called the college approximately six months prior to the visit. At that time, the chair discussed how he would like to conduct the visit, provided the self-study coordinators with a tentative schedule, and identified the groups and individuals the team planned to meet during the visit. The Team Chair also worked with the self-study coordinator to develop a tentative schedule for the visit, including exit interview times. This call is what started even more detailed planning and organizing of invitation lists, coordinating administrators' and board members' schedules, and preparing for the actual visit. During this initial conversation, the chair identified additional materials (catalog, audit report, assessment plan, etc.) to accompany the self-study document that would be received by the team members at least six weeks prior to the visit. The Pueblo Community College visit was strengthened by a team leader who maintained good communication with PCC self-study coordinators. Communication with the Team Chair was critical to the college's planning a well-executed on-campus visit. *The self-study coordinator who was in contact with the Team Chair made sure that their communications resulted in a clear understanding of (1) the constituents the Team Chair would like to meet; (2) the agenda that the Team Chair would like to follow during the site visit; (3) how and when the Team Chair would provide to the College the team members' travel itinerary, technology needs (computers, laptops), and team members' special diets or special accommodation needs; and (4) the best method of communication to address questions or concerns raised by the college.* This level of communication helped the coordinators begin the detailed planning that is necessary for a well-organized site visit and establish a framework for ongoing communication with the Team Chair.

During the last thirty days prior to the visit, the college provided the team with a Consultant-Evaluator team resource book. It included a map to the hotel from the airport, a map from the hotel to the college, a map of the college, a list of amenities provided by the hotel, suggested restaurants, and basic information about the community. The key to developing this resource book was trying to anticipate team members' needs for basic information about the community of Pueblo, Colorado, and Pueblo Community College.

The final weeks prior to the visit were consumed with details related to the visit, particularly in terms of arranging meeting rooms, food service, airport transportation for the team, and detailed logistics. This was accomplished by identifying one office as the contact for all team visit arrangements and inquiries as well as arrangements for meetings, time schedules, and special requests from the team members while they were on campus.

☐ Resource Room

Developing a Resource Room that was comfortable for the team, easily accessible, clean, and well-equipped, and that provided adequate information about the college was another challenge for the self-study coordinators. Originally, the coordinators were going to use another committee to accomplish this. However, as the team visit drew nearer, the coordinators decided to continue with the same process of planning and organizing, maintaining oversight, and delegating responsibilities.

The self-study coordinators decided to locate the room in a building that housed key administrators who would be readily accessible to the team and that was central to other buildings on campus. The room had adequate workspace for the six team members as well as a comfortable work environment. It also had sufficient space for the resource documents, the computer workstations, and other supplies and amenities provided to the team. The room held large work tables for each team member, comfortable office chairs, a telephone, a copy machine, computers linked to the college network and Internet, a paper shredder, a coat rack, an extensive assortment of office supplies, and a small office refrigerator that was stocked with a variety of beverages and light snacks.

The most important aspect of organizing the room was assuring that the team would have access to appropriate and necessary documents. The self-study committee chairs and other college faculty and staff were charged with providing the documentation. The Resource Room was organized and labeled in sections that corresponded with the titles of the chapters in the PCC Self-Study Report. The coordinator developed a list of key materials that were referenced in the self-study document and *Handbook of Accreditation*. As the resources were gathered, they were cataloged and placed in notebooks on tables around the perimeter of the Resource Room. The self-study coordinators decided to provide the materials on tables in an open format instead of filing cabinets so the team could more quickly and easily locate necessary information during the intense visit. A bookshelf was used to hold the self-study committee notebooks that provided evidence of the comprehensive self-study at PCC for the past three years.

A comprehensive Resource Room book was then created based on the materials in the room. The book was formatted in an easy-to-read font, and corresponded with the sections in the Resource Room, which in turn corresponded with the titles in the self-study document. The Resource Room book was produced after all the material was gathered and finalized in the Resource Room. A copy was provided in team members' hotel rooms, and the book was also available in the Resource Room.

Preparing and Informing Internal and External Constituents

One very important aspect of informing constituents is the process for seeking third party comment, as required by The Higher Learning Commission. This was planned ahead of time, and the process was completed two months prior to the visit. Originally the self-study coordinators had created an extensive list of those to be notified through this activity, and they had an elaborate plan. After evaluating their plan and timeline, the coordinators decided to make it a simple process, reduce the extensive list, and use the template provided in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. They saved a lot of time and money by not trying to do more than was required.

Preparing and informing internal and external constituents was accomplished during the two months prior to the on-site team and after the final document was printed. *The goal was to assure that key campus constituents and external constituents had access to the final document, were well-informed about the content of the self-study document, and were also aware of the activities and their involvement in the activities of the site visit.* The self-study coordinators were challenged to identify the appropriate number of key external constituents, continue to involve the internal constituents, maintain and promote acceptance of the self-study document, and provide an understanding of the activities during the site visit.

The self-study coordinators narrowed their focus to key players who needed to review the document as well as the individuals who would be called upon to visit with the team during the site visit. In addition to briefing all employees at a campus-wide meeting, the coordinators met with the college president, vice presidents, deans, directors, department chairs, and steering committee chairs to discuss the final document and their role during the site visit. The coordinators then arranged to address members of the Pueblo Community College's student senate, college advisory council, and college foundation. The self-study coordinators determined which constituents would need hard copies of the self-study and utilized electronic means to distribute the document to the other constituents. They also referred constituents to reference copies maintained in the library and in each administrator's office.

In addition to discussing the document and stressing the importance of reading it prior to the team visit, the coordinators informed the constituents of the background of each team member and provided them with team members' names and titles. They were also provided with the proposed schedule of activities and were briefed about their roles and responsibilities related to the schedule. *Taking the time to prepare internal and external constituents was a strong factor that contributed to the success of the site visit.* Pueblo Community College's site team visit was well executed because the team met with constituents who understood the self-study process, were aware of the college's strengths and challenges, and understood the site team's role in the college's accreditation process.

Conclusion

There were many factors that contributed to the success of the self-study process, the final self-study document, and the site team visit. The final year was possible because of the hard work by the college faculty and staff. Although getting through the final year appeared to be overwhelming at times, the final outcome was rewarding and gave everyone a sense of accomplishment. The key to each year, particularly the final year, was organizing and planning. This required simplifying complicated plans, juggling simultaneous tasks, maintaining a positive attitude, and promoting teamwork among all of the constituents. For Pueblo Community College, the result was a comprehensive self-study process, a clearly articulated self-study document, and a rewarding and valuable site visit that resulted in a recommendation for continued accreditation.

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A Guide for Writing the Self-Study Report and Preparing for the Team Visit: Just Follow the Yellow Brick Road

Nick Cheper
Carlotta Lockmiller

Steering committee members of institutions that are beginning the self-study process need insight into preparing for and writing a Self-Study Report as well as preparing for a team visit. Issues that need to be addressed include: What information and personnel are needed for writing? What preparations are necessary before writing? How can you find information that is evaluative? What are some of the pitfalls and surprises that can occur while writing the report? How do you prepare for the visit of the evaluation team?

The following guide is based on the recent self-study experiences of a criterion team leader and the self-study coordinator at East Central University (ECU), a public master's degree-granting institution located in Ada, Oklahoma. The steering committee mentoring session will provide more specific details on how ECU dealt with many of the issues discussed below, including what worked for us and what did not, and examples of materials we developed to keep us on the right road.

Preparing for Writing the Self-Study Report: Where Are We, Toto?

Although the Commission's reaccreditation process does not descend with the unexpectedness of a tornado, the effect is somewhat the same for many steering committee members. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum, members of a newly-created steering committee often feel like they have entered a new country. Their assignment is to prepare a Self-Study Report for the entire institution. Unfortunately, this cannot be accomplished by magic shoes, and a road map may not be immediately at hand. This guide is designed to help steering committee members find their way.

☐ **Taking the Right Road: What Do Steering Committee Members Need to Do?**

- ◇ You should have a thorough understanding of why you were selected to serve on the committee as well as of your responsibilities and duties. These should be established by the self-study coordinator and/or administration at the onset of the process. In addition, the goals of the self-study should be established during the first meeting(s) of the steering committee. Failure to agree formally on where you are going and how you plan to get there will result in much wasted time, hard feelings, and a general buildup of dissatisfaction among committee members.
- ◇ You will need to work with the self-study coordinator (and your administration) in preparing the self-study document. A willingness to work well with others, leadership abilities, respect of peers, effective listening and communication skills, and objectivity, along with a thorough knowledge of the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation*, are basic requirements for a successful steering committee member.
- ◇ You must establish a workable timeline and a systematic method for collecting and analyzing data. Ample time must be allowed for detours and backtracking, even though you have a guide. Consider building in extra time even when a need is not clearly apparent, since some individuals will just naturally turn in their work late. A timeline that is based on everyone getting everything in on the appointed date is doomed to failure.

Time also must be allowed for the Self-Study Report to be written, edited, and rewritten (maybe more than once) into the final self-study document. There will also need to be time and mechanisms in place to allow stakeholders to provide comments on a draft of your report.

- ◇ You should have a tentative outline of the Self-Study Report to use as a guide for preparing your section. Such an outline serves as a guide for what topics need to be researched and analyzed and also helps determine what subcommittees must be established to get the job done. Some topics fall into more than one criterion, and clear designation of which chapter deals with which subjects will avoid duplication of effort. Generally, a self-study will develop more coherently if it is organized according to the structure of the institution and then fitted to the five criteria presented in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.
- ◇ You must be familiar with the goals, expectations, patterns of evidence, and indicators required by the Commission. Much of this information is contained in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. Specific topics to be examined should include the following:
    - ○ What does the wording of a criterion mean for your institution, and how do you evaluate your institution in relation to a specific criterion?
    - ○ What basic data exist to indicate that your institution meets a particular criterion?
    - ○ What standards or benchmarks are available for you to measure against?
    - ○ What are the best methods of organizing and presenting collected data in order to help your self-study make its case?

It is important to be honest and deal fairly with real concerns. You should accentuate the positive, but omission of negative information or data will result in a flawed self-study and jeopardize your entire endeavor.

☐ Dorothy Found Help: How Can You Lighten Your Load?

- ◇ Faculty members are somewhat aware of activities related to academia but, as a general rule, have little understanding of the workings of the nonacademic side of an institution. You will need to establish committees, teams, or work-groups comprised of both faculty and staff personnel with expertise in unfamiliar areas such as the physical plant, various support services, finance, athletics, etc. Try to involve as many faculty, staff, and students as possible in your self-study. Without broad-based participation, the findings of the self-study will not be comprehensive, nor will the campus community feel a sense of ownership of the recommendations made in the Self-Study Report.
- ◇ Be sure to make use of existing data collected and compiled by various administrative and other offices. Most institutions have a wealth of data available. The challenge for steering committee members is determining what data they need and where to find them. You can waste a lot of time looking for information or recreating data already available. Formats for existing data may also need to be modified to provide evaluative evidence. Do not hesitate to get assistance from the self-study coordinator and the administration.
- ◇ It is wise to have established, standardized guidelines both for reporting data sources and for the format of the self-study document. It is particularly important for everyone to agree on a cutoff point for collection of data. (For example, end-of-the-semester data, fall 2001). Otherwise you may have one chapter using fall semester data and another using spring semester data. In addition, responsibilities for different work groups should be clearly delineated from the onset. At ECU, subcommittees concentrated on gathering and presenting the evidence (content), while an editing committee dealt with issues of grammar, punctuation, and style. Finally, a production committee worked on formatting, tables, proofreading, and the final presentation of the report.

☐ Writing the Report: You Are Definitely Not Home Yet!

- ◇ Make sure that everyone working on the report understands the critical importance of using evaluative, assessable data, not just descriptions. This can be difficult if you need to cover areas that do not have or use evaluative instruments. Although it is tempting to create numerous surveys to fill in the gaps, use of opinion surveys should be kept to a minimum. Faculty and other personnel generally will not fill out a bunch of surveys, and the results provide only a single snapshot in time, not longitudinal evidence.
- ◇ As you report the strengths and challenges of your institution, you will need to obtain data that are evaluative. Focus on comparisons of "what is" to "what should be." As a steering committee member you need to keep

asking "So what?" especially when drawing conclusions from the entire chapter. All recommendations made in the self-study should flow directly from the identified challenges, which in turn are based on the evaluative data already presented.

◇ Plan on writing at least three versions of your report. Draft one is usually a very rough version written by subcommittees and/or shaped into a document by designated writers. Draft two is a revision of draft one and usually involves making the report more evaluative and filling in identified gaps. At ECU we asked for stakeholder comments after this draft was completed. Draft three is the edited final version of the report that is ready to be sent to the printer. The process is actually not this cut and dried. The Self-Study Report is a fluid, not static, document. Since your institution is a moving target that changes as time passes, expect changes in content and even format to occur up to the last minute.

☐ Things to Remember on Your Way to Oz

◇ Be sensitive to the fact that members of your various subcommittees have other responsibilities and duties. They may also have supervisors for whom writing a self-study may not be a number one priority. You may not get data or reports when you need them, and you may need to remind individuals and subcommittees more than once about deadlines for their reports. If at all possible, build a little extra time into the schedules that you set to allow for unexpected delays.

◇ Rely on your self-study coordinator to help you find data or reports for areas about which you lack familiarity and to assist you when reports that you need are late or not in an appropriate format. Be prepared to handle people in a diplomatic way, but in especially difficult situations involve your coordinator to help smooth the way for you.

◇ Be sure that all source documents that you used in preparing your section of the report are turned into the Resource Room. Every assertion made in the Self-Study Report must be substantiated by some form of documentation. At ECU we created a temporary Resource Room and collected key documents early on to prevent different committees from having to search for the same information. If you use documents that are too large or too sensitive to be kept in the Resource Room, be sure to identify their exact location.

◇ Make clear to those involved in the preparation and writing of the self-study that the report is not a place for individual gripes or agendas, but rather is a place for concerns that affect the institution's ability to carry out its mission. For example, the fact that a professor wants more travel money to attend national meetings is not appropriate information to include unless there is a clear pattern of evidence that faculty development is an issue across campus and is affecting the capacity of an institution to promote student learning.

◇ As you work on the Self-Study Report, it is important to keep in mind what the Commission evaluation team members will be looking for when they visit your campus. Their agenda will include such questions as the following: Is the self-study well executed? Does the institution satisfy each of the five criteria for accreditation? Do the faculty, staff, and students agree with the conclusions of the self-study? Does the steering committee agree with the final appraisal of the institution? Are the conclusions of the self-study valid?

Getting Ready for the Team Visit: Time to Meet the Wizard(s)

☐ Publicity: Let Your Emerald Lights Shine Brightly

◇ Develop a publicity committee early on. Student, staff, administration, community members, and steering committee members should serve on this committee along with public information officers for the institution. This group should devise an action plan for publicizing the institution's self-study efforts and reporting progress at various stages of the process. If your institution has a journalism or mass communication department, students who are majors in this area can find wonderful opportunities for projects, thereby becoming an integral part of the self-study process and increasing the scope of faculty and student ownership of the report.

◇ Prepare for third party comment. Most often this responsibility falls to the self-study coordinator. Also plan for dissemination of your Self-Study Report. All your work is useless if nobody reads it. Moreover, members of the campus community will need to know what is in the report before the evaluation team comes. ECU prepared an executive summary of the Self-Study Report to encourage those individuals unwilling to read the entire self-study to at least be familiar with the strengths, challenges, and recommendations outlined in the complete report.

☐ As Time Runs Short: Standing at the Gate

- ◇ Get all the stakeholders (faculty, students, staff, administration, alumni, and community members) ready for the evaluation team visit. Your goal is to be certain they know when the team members are coming, why they are coming, and what information they will be looking for. This task is insurmountable if you wait until the last minute. Broad participation in the entire self-study process, not just at the end, is the key to a successful outcome.
- ◇ Assist, as required, in the preparation of the Resource Room. A basic list of the materials that should be found there is in the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation*. Clearly, most, if not all, of these materials should have been used in the preparation of the Self-Study Report, so this list makes a good guide for where to go to find supporting data.

Journey as Process: The End of the Road and the Beginning

As the reaccreditation process draws to a close and the evaluation team visits your campus, most steering committee members find great satisfaction in completion of such a large project. No doubt you may have encountered those who lack the courage or the heart to do the job well and possibly one or more individuals that you were sure lacked a brain. You may have endured the frustrations of wrong turns, the need to backtrack, or seemingly endless delays along the way. Such occurrences are common. Still, the journey itself has its own rewards. You will learn much about your own institution that you never knew before, and you will have the opportunity to work with individuals far outside your usual circle of colleagues. Such refreshment and novelty along with the solid satisfaction of doing a task well are the positive outcomes from following a well-marked and clearly delineated road.

For most steering committees, the journey is all. By the time the team of Consultant-Evaluators arrives on campus, the steering committee has fulfilled its purpose. The wizards turn out to be ordinary people who themselves have toiled on self-studies of their own institutions. Of course, they will use the Self-Study Report as a guide to learn about your school, and it should tell them almost everything, both positive and negative, that they will find in their own investigations. There is, however, an even bigger reward for steering committee members.

If done well, it is the Self-Study Report that your hard work has created that will in turn, serve as a guide for your institution in the next few years. The recommendations found in your Self-Study Report will provide direction for the future course of your institution. Thus the journey comes full circle and begins again.

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The Self-Study: A Tool for Telling Your Institution's Unique Story

Michael A. Scaperlanda

Teaser

Don't want to write a boring self-study that sleepily follows the five criteria? Use the self-study process to identify your institution's unique culture and then use the report to tell your story. The University of Oklahoma's (OU) Self-Study Report, "Realizing the Possibilities: Reaccreditation in a Time of Renewal" (available at http://www.ou.edu/ncaselfstudy/2001_Reaccreditation.pdf), portrays OU's efforts to build a vibrant community of learning inside and outside the classroom.

Half-Way Home

By this point in the process, your selection as self-study coordinator might feel like ancient history. And, as you gray by the minute, you are probably feeling more ancient also. The steering committee and relevant subcommittees were formed long ago and have been busy gathering and analyzing data. By this point, you might have received subcommittee reports and have some idea of what gaps in knowledge need to be filled. You are tired, but the drafting of the Self-Study Report looms large on the horizon. Will you be bored writing the report? Will others be bored reading it? Will it effectively serve its purposes without causing you and your readership sleeping sickness?

What follows is a series of tips for ensuring a credible but unique Self-Study Report.

☐ **Single Authored Report**

In your self-study plan (have you looked at it in the last year?), you most likely stated who was responsible for drafting the Self-Study Report. Some schools have the self-study coordinator draft the report, while other schools draft by committee. No matter what your plan calls for, I would encourage you to draft the report and send it to your steering committee and others for comment.

There are at least two important reasons for drafting the document yourself. First, reports that are written in committee sound as if they were written in committee. If you want to effectively tell your institution's unique story, speak with a single voice. Second, several different and often competing agendas may be in play during the self-study process. A single author, especially if he or she is insulated from the politics, will be able to pick and choose what to emphasize in the report in a way that will minimize the risk that any of the constituents will be offended.

I received this valuable tip from a workshop like this one from a school that had planned to have each subcommittee draft a section of the self-study. After initial drafts (what I would call subcommittee reports), it occurred to the self-study coordinator (a parent of teenagers, I am sure) that it would be easier to write the report himself and have the subcommittee members edit. Having a flexible plan, he shifted gears, taking over the drafting process and using the committee members as valuable editors.

☐ **Know the Purpose of Your Self-Study**

Is this a strategic planning document that will be used to help shape the institution for the next five or ten years? Is this a document meant to garner the confidence of what is likely to be a skeptical core of site evaluators? Is this a document designed to synthesize the past successes of the institution while confronting in an analytical way the challenges that lay ahead?

In the case of the University of Oklahoma, all concerned knew from the outset that the self-study process, while an important opportunity to step back and evaluate where we had been and where we were going, was not going to serve as a primary tool for strategic planning. The university had other processes that were well suited to that endeavor, and there was no need to force a dynamic and fluid planning process into the self-study framework. We also felt fairly confident that the University of Oklahoma met or exceeded the requirements for accreditation by the North Central Association. We knew we had to provide patterns of evidence demonstrating that we met the stated criteria, but this was not the primary focus of our report. The university had experienced exceptional growth in many areas during the decade since the last visit, and we wanted to use the self-study as a tool to create a coherent picture of the growth while attempting to realistically assess the challenges that lay ahead.

☐ Know Your Institution

You have looked at hundreds and perhaps thousands of documents, each telling a piece of your institution's story. You have talked with dozens of people involved in one way or another in the educational mission of your institution. You have not only been in the trees, but you have been examining these trees, branch by branch and leaf by leaf. Take the time to step back and look at the forest! What patterns emerge? What makes your institution unique? Is it the mission? The goals? The way it implements its mission? Every institution is unique in some way, and you, as self-study coordinator and report drafter, are in a position to bring that uniqueness into focus and articulate it in such a way that it is accessible to the larger community, including the site evaluators.

During the session, I will describe how I stepped back from the minutiae to see the patterns in the intellectual life of the University of Oklahoma, allowing me to develop an interesting and coherent theme around which I could weave the tale of OU's uniqueness while also satisfying the need to provide patterns of evidence demonstrating that the accreditation criteria had been satisfied.

☐ Dare to Be Different

So many of the self-studies that I had read in preparation for drafting OU's self-study followed a similar pattern. They each had approximately seven chapters, with an introduction, a conclusion, and a chapter devoted to each criterion. These were good, well-written self-studies, but I couldn't envision myself writing this type of document. I checked my self-study plan. Yes, the plan I had written the year before. And, sure enough, it called for the traditional, straightforward report with each of the substantive chapters addressing one of the criteria.

There was one primary reason that I chose to deviate from our self-study plan and the established practice of many institutions. The established practice seemed to curtail the ability to bring the institution to life. The story line would be truncated by breaking up the narrative in order to force "evidence" into the appropriate chapter. While I understood and appreciated the need to establish the patterns of evidence, I had a hard time pigeonholing each piece of evidence into one chapter dealing with one criterion. For example, an analysis of our academic support services directed toward assisting at risk students demonstrates that the University of Oklahoma has effectively organized its resources (Criterion 2) *and* that it acts with integrity toward its students (Criterion 5). Under the traditional model, evidence that these programs are successful would be placed in the chapter addressing Criterion 3 and evidence that the university has the infrastructure in place to continue to deliver these services would be in the chapter demonstrating that Criterion 4 had been satisfied.

What I have termed the traditional model provides an effective and safe organizing principle. This, however, was not the organizing principle that I wanted to use for the University of Oklahoma's Self-Study Report. After consulting with our Higher Learning Commission liaison, I went to the steering committee to propose that we organize the Self-Study Report around the theme of building a community of learning in a time of renewal. Chapter 1 provided an introduction, including a synopsis of the university, a glimpse at the current renaissance, and a history of the university. Chapter 2 explored the academic core of this learning community, focusing on degree programs, faculty, enrollment management, undergraduate education, graduate education, scholarship and creative activity, a sampling of academic units, and assessment. Chapter 3 looked at programs and facilities designed purposefully to enhance the learning environment within and beyond the classroom walls. Chapter 4 analyzed the infrastructure supporting the learning environment. Chapter 5's conclusion covered the GIRs, addressed the concerns expressed by the NCA a decade before, set forth major challenges and goals, detailed the self-study process, and requested reaccreditation. This format allowed the steering committee to coherently paint a picture of the dynamic educational opportunity afforded by the University of Oklahoma.

One significant challenge remained. Having not organized the self-study around the five criteria, I worried that the patterns of evidence would be obscured and rendered less accessible by the narrative. I employed two techniques to draw the Consultant-Evaluators' attention to the patterns of evidence that demonstrated compliance with the criteria without unnecessarily detracting from the community of learning theme. First, within the narrative, the report cited the relevant criterion. So, for example, if we thought that a section of the report provided evidence that we had met Criterion Two, I would end the sentence with "[Criterion Two]." Second, Chapter 5 contained a section that essentially served as an index for the criteria. For example, Chapter 5 of the self-study restated Criterion Two followed by "The self-study has provided a pattern of evidence demonstrating that Criterion Two has been met. The evidence is clearly marked throughout the self-study, and the following are meant merely as illustrative examples of the quality and quantity of evidence presented throughout. OU has shown governance by..., see, e.g., pages 2.2, 2.10, 4.1, supra; effective administration..." I used all of the suggested patterns of evidence listed in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, cross-referencing them to the places in the report where we had provided evidence for that particular item.

In addition to serving as a guidepost for the evaluation team, this section also provided steering committee with a handy checklist to ensure that we had covered all of our bases.

Conclusion

Organizing the Self-Study Report around a theme that accentuates the institution's unique contributions to higher education will not be for every coordinator or every school. For those who have the interest, the support of their institution, and the support of their Higher Learning Commission liaison, this can be a rewarding way to lift yourself out of the doldrums that are bound to have set in halfway through this process while also leading to the production of a report that might be read more widely than the team of Consultant-Evaluators.

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Strategies for a Productive Team Visit

Emma Palmer
David B. Turner

Introduction

All member institutions accredited by The Higher Learning Commission must undergo a comprehensive visit to renew their accreditation at least every ten years. The procedures associated with the accreditation visit (e.g., development of the report, team composition) are identified and structured by the Commission. Basically, all institutions follow the procedures outlined in the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation* for preparing for the visit. One area that is left to participating institutions is the coordination of the visiting team's itinerary. This presentation will provide institutions preparing for a comprehensive site visit with an overview of the activities that Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) used to help the Consultant-Evaluators utilize their time effectively and efficiently. The activities related to:

- Communication and correspondence
- Travel arrangements and accommodations
- On-site arrangements
- Preparing the college community

Background

In April 1999, Milwaukee Area Technical College, a large, urban, multi-campus institution, underwent a comprehensive site visit. A fourteen-member team visited the college for two and one-half days and, after an extensive review, recommended that the college be granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years. While much of the work of the college was revealed in the college's comprehensive Self-Study Report, many activities associated with the development of the Consultant-Evaluators' on-campus itinerary were not identified in the report. Milwaukee Area Technical College took seriously the importance of developing a plan with specific daily activities. The successful implementation of these activities helped to ensure that the Consultant-Evaluators' time on campus was not only used effectively and efficiently, but also that they had a rewarding experience at the college.

Communication and Correspondence

Communication and correspondence are among the most important activities that institutions need to address. All members of the college community must be well informed about the site visit. The college community must have information regarding the dates of the visit, team composition, team expectations, areas of concern, and general information regarding the purpose of the site visit. The self-study coordinators at Milwaukee Area Technical College ensured that the faculty and staff were informed about the site visit by giving presentations and disseminating information to program advisory committees, the college's various divisions and departments, and community groups. Monthly reports were given to the college president and to the college's board of directors. Faculty in-service sessions regarding the college's progress were scheduled at the beginning of each semester during teacher coordination day activities. All department administrators scheduled meetings with their respective faculty and/or staff to ensure that the college community was knowledgeable about the site visit and the importance of the college's accreditation to the college and to students.

During the year of the team's visit, continuous contact with the team chair was essential. The team chair was invited to visit the college for a pre-visit to gain an understanding of the progress made by the college and to get a sense that the college was prepared for the visit. The methods used to communicate with the team chair included telephone calls, written correspondence, fax, and video-conferencing. It was also essential to answer all questions and concerns from the team chair. The various methods cited worked to the benefit of MATC and the team. It should also be mentioned that constant contact with the institution's Commission staff liaison is essential. The staff liaison needs to be aware of all problems, concerns, and changes associated with the college.

Travel Arrangements and Accommodations

The Higher Learning Commission is responsible for all team members' expenses. However, it is important that college representatives assist the team in securing accommodations that are convenient, secure, and provide a comfortable environment. To assist the team, the college reserved rooms at a nearby hotel for the team members. MATC provided transportation to the hotel upon the team members' arrival and to the airport for departure. Additionally, transportation was provided each day to and from the hotel. To ensure that the team members had the things they needed to carry out their responsibilities, a meeting room at the hotel was reserved. The meeting room was equipped with a telephone, computers, printers, fax machine, college materials (e.g., catalogs, program brochures), and supporting documentation. A welcome basket was also provided in each team member's room.

The team was scheduled to arrive on Sunday and to leave on the following Wednesday. On Sunday evening, a reception at the hotel was scheduled. Invitees included key staff members, academic administrators, and the college's board of directors. The reception was a great way to have the team members gain familiarity with members of the college community in a relaxed, informal manner. Be sure to check with the team chair before scheduling a social event on Sunday evening.

On-Site Arrangements

To assist the team, a workroom was reserved at the college where team members could develop and discuss their observations and opinions in privacy. Continental breakfast was served each morning and refreshments provided throughout the day. An administrative secretary who had strict confidentiality and who provided support to the team staffed the workroom. The room was secure the entire time that the team was on campus. The room was equipped with a fax machine, telephone, and multiple computers. The self-study coordinators worked closely with the college's information technology staff.

Another key element in the visit's success was the use of a hospitality room. This room was developed for the team to use if needed. Volunteers (e.g., students, faculty, staff) staffed the room for the primary purpose of assisting the team members. Some of the activities assumed by the volunteers included escorting team members to meeting rooms and driving them to off-campus locations. The use of the hospitality room was another way that MATC allowed the college community to be a part of the process. Comments from the team members indicated that they appreciated the extra accommodations that the college provided them.

Preparing the College Community

One of the most important factors associated with a successful site visit is an informed college community. The total college community must be aware of the purpose of the site visit and know what to anticipate when the team arrives on campus. Since most colleges undergo site visits at least every ten years, it is imperative that all involved with the college are up-to-date on the role and responsibilities of the team. To ensure this understanding, the college's self-study coordinators made presentations to all departments of the college (e.g., building services, purchasing agents, bookstore managers, student services representatives). As stated previously, presentations were made to all program advisory committees, the MATC board of directors, the deans' cabinet, and the divisional representatives. A mock accreditation team visit was scheduled with various departments of the college, and follow-up meetings with the respective department heads followed the interviews.

To ensure that the college was on track in its preparations for the visit, the NCA coordinators were in constant communication with the college's Commission liaison. It is important that the college community have an opportunity to meet with the liaison and to voice concerns. It should go without saying that professional decorum be reflected at all meetings with the liaison and with the team.

In April 1999, Milwaukee Area Technical College had a successful site visit. The success of the visit can be attributed to a lot of factors, but most importantly it resulted from the college's progress in addressing the concerns cited in the previous visit and fulfilling all the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation. Additionally, the college took great pains to ensure that the college community was well informed about the role and responsibility of the visiting team and the importance of accreditation to the college. While the positive experience and special accommodations afforded by MATC can in no way supplant the academic efforts by the college to meet the GIRs or the criteria, ensuring that the team had a positive experience reflected professional concern and sensitivity to the needs of the college's Commission colleagues.

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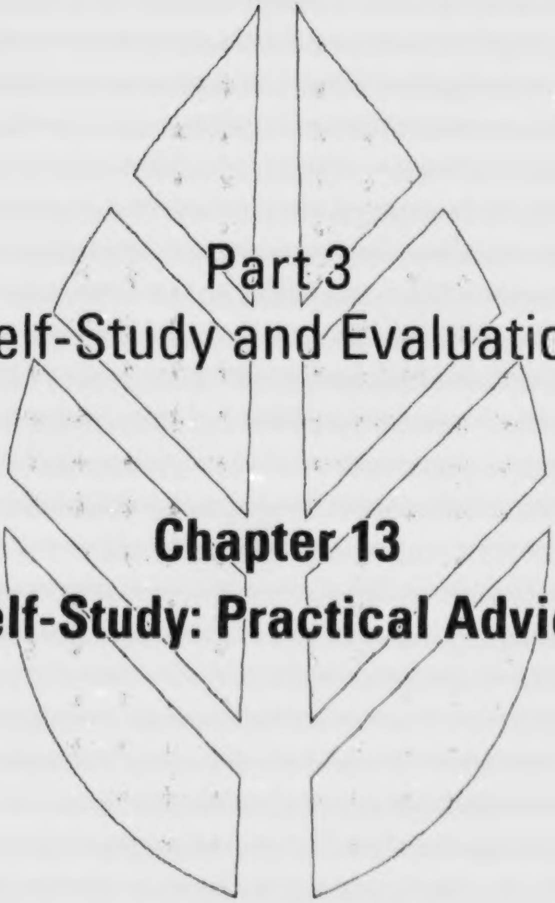

Part 3
Self-Study and Evaluation

Chapter 13
Self-Study: Practical Advice

The Higher Learning Commission

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Managing the Stress of the Self-Study Process

Mark Taylor

Introduction

Stress is a normal biochemical response to pressures in the environment and is designed to assist us in "fight or flight" (Selye 1975; Benson 1975). Though the self-study is definitely an environmental pressure, the "fight or flight" response is not appropriate to its challenges. When we are not allowed to work out stress through action during the stressful event, we suffer the consequences of these stress chemicals. Their immediate effect of these chemicals is to reduce our effectiveness by reducing verbal skills, emotional control, and problem solving. The long-term effects can be physical as well as psychological, emotional, and social. This program describes some of the special pressures, or stressors, of the self-study process, and describes a plan for managing the stress of the self-study process.

Stress and the Self-Study

Though we all deal with the "normal" pressures of life and have varying levels of stress management success, the self-study process presents a special set of life challenges, especially for those responsible for the development of the Self-Study Report.

- The **importance** of the evaluation process means that the stakes are high and the consequences of failure almost unthinkable. Even when the possibility of a negative consequence is very low, if that negative consequence is powerful and important, many people find the risk extremely stressful.
- Past successful self-studies by the institution may not be comforting but may contribute to an **expectation of success.** If the institution has a history of success in the evaluation process, it may seem that there is "nowhere to go but down"; a successful report merely meets the expectations.
- **Issues of choice** may impact some who are involved in the self-study. We tend to better manage stress, and actually seek out stress, in areas that we select; we may enjoy the roller coaster we decide to ride, but not the speech we have to make. Some may not have chosen to be involved in or take responsibility for the self-study process. For those schools with a professional or department with obvious responsibility for such an undertaking, this might be less of an issue.
- At smaller schools or those with different systems of organization, a person might be asked to have major responsibility for the self-study and not feel that he or she has adequate **competence or experience** to be successful. Some coordinators may never have been through the process, but are selected based on other factors.
- Unless the institution's organizational architecture is established to make the self-study a natural part of institutional life, those responsible for the self-study may be put in the position of placing major expectations on and requiring information, data, and performance from people over whom they have no **organizational administrative responsibility.** Questions of authority may arise, especially when complicated by budgetary and funding issues, and add pressure.
- Finally, **other responsibilities,** both at the college and outside, might not abate, so time and coping pressures can be increased by the self-study process.

The Consequences of Stress

The long-term effects and health consequences of stress are well known and include hypertension, poor organ function, headaches, lowered resistance to disease, and increased morbidity (Selye 1975; Benson 1975, Sapolsky 1998; Kabat-Zinn 1990). The physiologic changes that prepare us to fight or flee tend to reduce our immediate skills, including our verbal skills, emotional control, logic, problem solving, judgment, and memory. These are all skills we need to be successful, manage modern pressures, and advance the self-study process. Our natural stress response can therefore be seen as deleterious to the self-study process.

The Stress Cycle

Stress can become a self-perpetuating cycle when our experience of stress leads to the expectation that the world will be stressful. When we are unable to metabolize the stress chemicals through "fight or flight," or a planned stress management technique, we are left with residuals that contribute to the well-known health consequences of stress. Another consequence of these residual chemicals may be psychological and create a self-fulfilling prophecy that the world is stressful. This can perpetuate our stress as we trigger the stress response to more events, both in the environment and psychologically generated (Selye 1975; Benson 1975, Sapolsky 1998; Kabat-Zinn 1990).

Stress Management

Effective stress management, as presented in this model, utilizes three interconnected behavioral practices: relaxation, exercise, and dietary management. Though each of these contributes to stress management and healthy living, all tend to have augmentative, complementary, and synergistic effects when linked.

- **Relaxation** is a stress management technique designed to turn off the sympathetic nervous system "fight or flight" response, and to turn on the parasympathetic nervous system relaxation response (Benson 1975). In practice, relaxation is a learned skill in eliciting a specific neurological response through planned mental activity. The relaxation response is characterized by deep physical relaxation, detachment from the physical environment and physical sensations, and mental quiet. The relaxation response is best elicited with a passive attitude in a comfortable position in a quiet environment with an object of mental focus, such as breathing or a mantra. In addition to directly countering the "fight or flight" response, relaxation has a variety of other stress management, cognitive, and health-related benefits including increased concentration and memory, reduction in blood pressure, and reductions in feelings of anxiety and tension. Relaxation, in the form of meditation, has long been appreciated as a form of mental training, as well as a religious practice to link with the sacred (Benson 1975).

- **Aerobic exercise** as a stress management technique has the primary benefit of metabolizing excess stress chemicals. Aerobic exercise is physical activity aimed at improving cardiovascular fitness through maintaining a desired heart rate over a set amount of time on a regular schedule. Exercise is a critical part of our basic requirement for healthy physiologic function. Our muscles obviously work better and are stronger as a result of exercise, but all of our organ systems also benefit from the increased oxygen uptake generated in exercise. Exercise has numerous other health benefits, from increasing oxygen uptake and cardiac output to decreasing resting heart rate, blood pressure, and body fat. Cognitively, people report feeling more competent and capable when they exercise (Douillard 1994). These benefits should be helpful in managing the self-study process. (Sedentary people should see their physician before starting any strenuous activity program.)

- **Dietary management** as an element of a comprehensive stress management program includes a range of eating and "chemical input" behaviors that can reduce overall physiological stress, reduce the intensity of the stress response, augment the other stress management protocols of relaxation and exercise, and generally contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Some of the chemicals we ingest in food, drinks, and through other intake systems have a stressful impact on the body. The negative health consequences of smoking and the use of other tobacco products is well documented, as they place numerous physiological stressors on the body. Excessive caffeine, excessive alcohol intake, and high salt diets (for some individuals) can reduce the body's ability to manage stress. Few people drink enough water. A diet that provides adequate hydration, limited caffeine and alcohol, is high in complex carbohydrates, is low in fat and sugar, and has adequate vitamin and mineral content can have health benefits, make relaxation and exercise easier and more effective, and help manage stress (Douillard 1994; Payne and Hahn 2000). All of these can contribute to a more successful self-study process.

◇ **Synergies.** These elements support each other as well as having individual benefits. For example, it is easier to relax if some stress chemicals have been burned off in exercise, and it is easier to exercise with a proper diet. Exercise is a powerful motivator to eat a healthy diet and burns excess calories. Relaxation can help reduce eating motivated by stress, so it can aid in dietary management.

Managing the Stresses of the Self-Study

A stress management program of relaxation, exercise, and dietary management, while not directly related to the self-study, can improve the effectiveness of those responsible for the report. Some other techniques and perspectives, as well as ways of organizing the self-study process, can help address the challenges of the self-study process described earlier.

◇ **Importance.** Stress related to the importance of the evaluation process should not be discounted entirely, as it might be a significant motivator to elicit cooperation across campus in gathering data and developing the report. If it can be kept in mind that the purpose of the process is to assist institutions to assess and improve programs and services and that all schools have room for improvement, the fear of being criticized might be reduced and a more efficacious perspective developed.

◇ **Expectation of success.** Past successful self-studies by the institution probably predict success in future self-studies. It might be important to emphasize to the college community that the self-study process will reveal areas for improvement, and that the willingness to address these is a sign of personal and institutional strength. Being open with concerns about the self-study, both in content and in process, can help keep others from developing unrealistic expectations of a "perfect" report and so hopefully reduce stress on those responsible for the self-study.

◇ **Issues of choice.** Individuals who are selected to take major responsibility for the self-study process, as opposed to those for whom it is a natural part of regular responsibilities or those who have volunteered, might need to make major efforts to decide that participation is something positive for them. As is the case with most situations we do not choose but cannot opt out of, a stress management strategy of focusing on the potential positive outcomes and deciding that it is something that we do want or need to do might be most effective. It is rarely helpful for anyone other than the person who asked us to serve to know that it was not our choice.

◇ **Competence or experience.** Some people with major responsibility for the self-study may have very limited experience with either the self-study process or even their school's ongoing self assessment activities. New activities about which we question our competence can be among the most professionally stressful. There is some reason people were selected for such a major undertaking, so there is some official affirmation of belief in their ability. Someone believes that they are competent for the tasks. It is possible that senior administration wanted someone with "new eyes" to look at the school, and so develop the self-study. It might be important to obtain a commitment of assistance from more experienced persons in the college community to significantly address gaps in specific knowledge and skills, and to develop a relationship with the Commission staff liaison.

◇ **Organizational administrative responsibility.** Ideally, the self-study will simply be a compilation and reorganization of existing information from ongoing self-monitoring and self-assessment efforts. At some schools, however, the process is more complicated and requires major expenditures of time and money to generate data and reports, and may even result in making adjustments to areas found to be problematic. When those with responsibility for developing the self-study do not have administrative responsibility over those they expect to be compliant, requests for data, information, and performance might need to be routed through the appropriate senior staff. Another option would be an official fiat ordering compliance, though this can be viewed as "heavy handed" and might foster limited compliance rather than true cooperation.

◇ **Other responsibilities.** Those significantly involved in the self-study process might be put in the ironic (and stressful) situation of neglecting the very essential duties they are documenting for the self-study. Release time or a realignment of other responsibilities should be industry standard in the development of the self-study, both to manage stress and to produce the best possible self-study.

Conclusion

The self-study process can be viewed as a positive challenge for individuals and institutions. Though the self-study is an opportunity for both personal and institutional growth, many people find the process stressful, and may find that this aggravates and exacerbates their other life stressors. A coordinated program of relaxation, exercise, and dietary management, along with management of stressors specifically related to the self-study process, can help in developing life patterns less vulnerable to the negative consequences of stress, and a more positive self-study experience.

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Self-Study Calendar and Collaboration

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Introduction

To paraphrase the architect Mies van der Rohe, "The proof is in the details." While we recognize that each college self-study process is unique, we also know that numerous common elements function in all self-studies. If coordinators could know the many details at the outset of the process, their tasks might seem less (or more) overwhelming than they already do. We look at countless plans and checklists that others have used, but we rarely see all the details in one place, primarily because each study is different. So we do the best we can to synthesize a variety of suggestions as we organize our own approaches to self-study. The best we can do is pick and choose from the process details of others when we become architects of self-study for our own colleges. Once we build our process, we help the next crew of appointed architects by telling them what we did so that they can decide what will serve them best. I certainly borrowed a great many ideas for organizing the self-study I helped coordinate, ideas from sources I can no longer specifically identify. Now it's my turn to share some of what worked well for us.

The Process

For me the key element to a successful self-study process is a carefully detailed calendar. But I found it difficult, even with models, to project a process I'd never created before, particularly the final stage of the process. However, I was fortunate in having three consultant-evaluators as colleagues on campus, C-Es with more than fifty collective years of site visit experience among them. The next most important piece of advice I would give to any self-study coordinator is to recognize the importance of delegating leadership responsibilities for the many details that lie outside the Self-Study Report that the committees and subcommittees address. Even co-coordinators need responsible leaders for subsidiary tasks; coordinators should not be expected to micromanage all the details.

Our three-year process of self-study seemed more manageable when organized in a four-stage calendar. In addition to the self-study chair, the coordinator and his assistant, the steering committee (the preceding three people plus the research director and the five criteria chairs, among them the three experienced C-Es), the subcommittee chairs, the subcommittee members, and the research committee, we collaborated with a crew of responsible leaders. They included the college research office, an outside polling company for telephone surveys, and the college archivist. The director of the document center created the design and layout of the report and the newsletters. We also collaborated with the director of strategic initiatives, the college marketing office, a hospitality coordinator, the director of facilities management, and our information services department. Self-study coordinators need to know what kind of help to ask for and whom to ask. The following paragraphs present a generalized, roughly sequential account of our four-phase calendar for self-study, an account addressed in more detail during the self-study workshop session.

Phase One

During the twelve to thirteen months (minus three summer months) of Phase One, the selection and self-selection of participants occurred—chair, coordinator, criteria chairs, steering committee, subcommittee chairs, and members. The chair, the research director, and the coordinator conducted a one-day off-site orientation for all the participants. We notified the Commission of our preferred site visit dates approximately two-and-a-half years in advance. We began a newsletter and published it every two months to inform the campus about the progress of the self-study. The subcommittees developed work plans for their data collection and subcommittee reports. The work plans addressed five issues: (1) stated assumptions about the domain of inquiry; (2) five or more quality standards for the domain; (3) what the subcommittee planned to look at; (4) methods, procedures; and processes for information gathering; and (5) research requests for the research office.

Phase Two

In the seven months of Phase Two, the steering committee reviewed and made suggestions on the subcommittee work plans as the committees began their data collection and evaluation of information. The coordinator submitted a self-study plan to the Commission liaison for approval. Research requests were compiled, and the research office developed student, community, and employee surveys, and conducted focus groups with the three stakeholder populations. At the beginning of the second year, we met our self-imposed deadline for all institutional data, financial data, and survey information, except the results of the employee survey, which became available six weeks later. The following month we held a reception for all self-study participants and gave each a gift of appreciation for the work already completed.

Phase Three

At the beginning of Phase Three, an eleven- to twelve-month period, the subcommittees analyzed and synthesized survey and focus group information for three or more months during the drafting of their reports. Over a four-month period, subcommittees submitted first drafts that the steering committee reviewed and returned with suggestions before the final drafts (eight-page limit) were composed. From those, the coordinator assembled a final draft made available online to all staff, students, and the community. Following a public hearing, the draft underwent a final edit before the layout designer formatted the Self-Study Report in PageMaker.

Subcommittee chairs and representative members held a series of five meetings with the vice president for instruction and student services to review the approximately sixty recommendations in the final report draft and to comment on their prioritization by the steering committee for implementation. Shortly thereafter, the final report draft was submitted to the college president for one more review and then a month later to the board of trustees.

In the last two months of Phase Three, while enjoying the elation of having completed the report, we began preparations for the site visit and worked with an outside printer to complete publication of the report. We collaborated with our facilities management team to determine layout and furnishings for the Resource Room. A designer in the marketing office created a visual identification (color, design, logo) for all signs and name tags during the site visit. Marketing also helped the assistant to the coordinator assemble extensive campus information packets for the site team members. The hospitality coordinator and the steering committee made decisions about appropriate gifts for the visitors.

Also at the end of Phase Three, the college published third party comment notices in local newspapers, the student newspaper, and credit and non-credit schedules of classes. These notices met the guidelines of the Commission.

Phase Four

The first important task of Phase Four, the last six months before the site visit, was publication of the Self-Study Report, a task that took a month longer than anticipated. Fortunately that extra month had been built into the calendar. At the beginning of Phase Four, the chair and coordinator made preliminary contact with the site team chair to develop the agenda for the visit. Soon after, we mailed the packets of campus information to the team members.

Approximately five months before the visit, the hospitality coordinator made hotel reservations for the team members and booked a hotel meeting room for the dates they requested. She also arranged for the Monday presidential welcome breakfast on campus and the Monday evening dinner with the board of trustees. Looking ahead to the conclusion of the process, she made arrangements for the Wednesday evening celebration hosted by the college president for all the self-study participants following the site team's departure.

The assistant to the coordinator created a database of reference materials and located any source data not already submitted with final drafts. She assembled all the binders of information and developed cross-reference sheets for data location. In collaboration with the marketing office, the assistant coordinated the preparation of all signs, announcements, and name tags for the visit.

Six weeks before the visit, we sent the Self-Study Report and the Commission-required institutional materials to the site team. We included an eight-page update to cover college action on recommendations from the time the self-study concluded six months earlier. The coordinator fielded requests from the team chair for additional documents and information, which he forwarded electronically. One month before the visit, the team chair requested that we participate in the first use of the new team report format designed by the Commission. We agreed, and our decision did not significantly affect our preparation for the visit but greatly enhanced the depth of consultation we received from the team in its report.

In the last month of preparation, the hospitality coordinator arranged for vehicles and drivers to provide airport transportation for the team members as well as local transportation during the visit. We completed installation and testing of office equipment for the Resource Room. We made final arrangements in the auditorium used for the Wednesday exit interview with the team. Throughout the four weeks before the visit, we conducted consistent on-campus publicity to make sure stakeholders would recognize the team members and understand what to expect from them during the three days of observation and inquiry. When finally those three days arrived, we were prepared.

Conclusion

The people who guide a college self-study benefit from recognizing the extended nature of the process. A detailed calendar allows all the participants to address tasks in manageable chunks during realistic time frames. The ability to collaborate with colleagues and draw on the varied resources of the institution accomplishes the many different aspects of the project, from interviewing, research, writing, and editing skills to leadership, publicity, publishing, and hospitality talents.

Honest recognition of the individual college culture in which a self-study occurs enables the coordinator to determine what is possible and who can best construct each room in the structure. The coordinator doesn't need to choose the interior color for each wing of the building; he or she only needs to make sure the colors harmonize.

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The Selection, Care, and Feeding of the Steering Committee: A Key to Successful Self-Study

Donald Bennion
George Liepa
Patrick Melia

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) recently completed a successful self-study process that culminated in the award of continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years and the approval of the university's second doctoral program, a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Although there are many reasons for the success of the self-study effort, we believe that the centerpiece of this success can be attributed to the effective work of a twenty-eight-member self-study steering committee.

In the following pages, the self-study coordinator and two members of the steering committee explain the key ways in which an effective steering committee was selected and remained fully committed to the self-study process for more than two years.

Selecting the Steering Committee

The selection of members for the steering committee is one of the most important decisions that an institution will make when preparing for reaccreditation. It is, therefore, a process that should not be rushed. The EMU deans' council, in consultation with the self-study coordinator and others throughout the university, spent an entire semester selecting committee members. The goal of this process was to establish a committee that not only represented all areas of EMU but was also racially diverse. We wanted individuals who had good ideas to share and were willing to do the work required for producing a successful Self-Study Report and visit.

The committee that was established included:

Committee Member	Appointed by
the self-study coordinator	the provost
the assistant to the president	the president
the associate provost	the provost
four academic department heads	the provost and representing four of EMU's five colleges
one academic dean	the provost and representing the deans' advisory council
the faculty assistant for assessment	the provost
one academic associate dean	the provost and representing EMU's fifth college
one member of the alumni association	the vice president for university relations

Committee Member	Appointed by
the associate vice president for business and finance	the vice president of business and finance
the director of records and registration (registrar)	the vice president for enrollment services
the coordinator of community college relations	the provost
four faculty members, including the immediate past president of the faculty council	the president of the faculty council
the associate dean of graduate studies	the provost
one representative of the graduate council graduate council	the chair of the graduate council
one graduate student (doctoral student)	the president of the graduate student association
the director of the Holman Learning Center	the provost
the head of the library	the provost
two representative of student affairs	the vice president for student affairs
the president of student government	self-appointed
an associate director of university computing	the director of university computing
the director of university planning	the provost
the head of the psychology department representing doctoral programming	the provost

The process of selecting the individuals who were appointed by someone other than the provost required extensive consultation with the appointing authority to make certain that all committee members would take the task seriously and would be willing to devote the time necessary to do an excellent job. It the case of EMU, the extensive time in selecting committee members paid off. All members participated actively and made valuable contributions throughout the lengthy self-study process.

The Steering Committee Meeting

The type of people selected by an institution to serve on a steering committee are busy people. It is therefore of utmost importance for all committee meetings to be fairly short, to be scheduled at a time when all members can attend, to end on time, and to accomplish a great deal. To incorporate all of these factors, EMU scheduled its steering committee meetings only once per month. The schedule of meetings began in January 1998 and did not end until April 2001. Meetings were held on Fridays, from noon to 1:30 P.M. To provide an additional incentive, a buffet lunch was served at the beginning of each session. That meant that the business part of the meeting was limited to only one hour. Because of proper preparation for each meeting, there were only two meetings during the entire twenty-eight-month period when we had to add an additional half-hour to the scheduled meeting time.

A goal of the university was to have each steering committee meeting run in a way that encouraged maximum member participation and coverage of the agenda. To do this, all members received the agenda for each meeting (including copies of material to be discussed) and the minutes of the last meeting at least one week in advance. The agenda did not discourage discussion, but it did focus the discussion on the action that needed to be taken. To create a professional environment, tables were placed in a closed block formation, and large-print table tents with participant names were placed in front of each member. Most members expressed their views freely. The few who did not were called on to make certain that their views were also considered. We found that the open atmosphere created an excellent exchange of ideas, and no one appeared to be threatened by his/her colleagues.

Maintaining Committee Members' Involvement

A major concern of the self-study coordinator was to get, and to keep, all committee members actively involved in the self-study process. Not only were members' ideas solicited at meetings, but all committee members also chaired or served on one or more of the self-study chapter-writing committees. All such committees were chaired by a member of the steering committee. Committee members were also kept involved by having them review each draft of each chapter of the Self-Study Report, attend public hearings on the report, and report back to the committee on any concerns or issues raised by members of the constituency they represented. In addition, the self-study coordinator produced a monthly newsletter, *NCA Self-Study Matters*, which identified the contributions of committee members and featured articles written by committee members. The success of these efforts is reflected by the fact that no member left the committee, except in cases of employment changes, and no member ceased to attend meetings and related functions.

Providing Rewards to Committee Members

From the beginning of the self-study process, it was realized that rewards of a financial nature were not possible. We therefore built in a number of inexpensive rewards. In addition to a nice lunch once a month, members were presented with steering committee member pins and NCA tote bags at the first meeting. These items proved to be very popular. The camaraderie that developed during the twenty-seven months and the buy-in to the self-study process led members to ask to attend the opening dinner and the exit interview with the visiting team. This had not been done in the past at EMU, but the president and provost gladly agreed to the request. Once the visit was concluded and the steering committee made its recommendations to the president and provost concerning ways the advice provided by the visiting team could be implemented, we held a reception for the steering committee. At the reception, each member received several tokens of recognition: a letter of appreciation (with a copy to the member's immediate supervisor), an engraved wood plaque, a T-shirt, a bookstore gift certificate, and words of appreciation for his/her contribution.

Conclusion

There are many factors that go into a successful accreditation self-study. In our opinion, the most important is the selection, care, and feeding of the self-study steering committee. If this is done properly, a dedicated and competent steering committee will conduct the comprehensive self-study in a way that reflects very well on the institution. To assure the success of the self-study, care must be taken in selecting committee members, providing efficient and open committee meetings, getting and keeping all members of the committee involved throughout the process, and providing rewards to committee members. The real reward for committee members was seeing the results of their hard work—a successful reaccreditation of the university.

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A Model for Engaging the College Community During a Self-Study

Susan Cochrane
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The College of St. Catherine Higher Learning Commission self-study team has developed a model to engage constituents of the college community in the self-study process. This model includes an interactive tool that educates, generates excitement, and can be easily adapted by other institutions.

The College of St. Catherine is a comprehensive institution with campuses in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. This ninety-seven-year-old Catholic college for women has 4,600 students in all degree programs, associate through graduate. The college has undergone dramatic changes since the last self-study in 1992. In 1986 the College of St. Catherine merged with St. Mary's College to form the College of St. Catherine, with campuses in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Minneapolis campus offers associate degree programs in health care, and the St. Paul campus offers traditional baccalaureate programs for women and graduate programs. During the 1992 self-study, the evaluation team report indicated that "The 'acquisition' has not yet resulted in a 'merger.'" In addition to the challenge of completing the merger, the college experienced financial constraints that resulted in frozen salaries for several years.

In 1999 the college selected a new president. She implemented a new organizational structure; appointed three new vice presidents; with the reorganized board of trustees created a new vision statement; and engaged the college in a strategic planning process, which resulted in a new strategic plan.

One goal of self-study committees is to engage their institutions in the self-study process. Because of the complexity of changes at the College of St. Catherine, the self-study committee believed that, to reflect the dynamic changes, we needed to educate the entire campus community not only about the self-study process, but also about changes that have taken place at the college during the past ten years.

We present this model as a work in progress. The comprehensive visit for the College of St. Catherine will take place in February 2003.

The model of interactive engagement and a widespread communication plan are critical because of how the self-study committee and its work are structured. The self-study co-chairs have clear and consistent support from the president, vice president for academic affairs, and the president's cabinet. The co-chairs are the dean of professional studies, representing academic affairs, and the dean of students. The vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty serves as the liaison to the president and her cabinet. The thirteen-member self-study committee represents all degree programs, both campuses, faculty and staff, and experienced and new members of the college community. No other subcommittees or task forces were created to complete the work of the self-study.

Self-study committee members are responsible for one of the five criteria for accreditation. Requests for input, data, evaluation, and analysis are made to constituents, including elected and ad hoc committees; formal and informal groups of faculty, staff, students, alums; and the board of trustees. The self-study committee decided to engage existing committees and groups rather than to create new large committees. Therefore, it became important to identify and engage all constituents early in the process in a way that generated excitement and commitment to the process.

The co-chairs created a model that includes an interactive tool that educates, engages constituents in the process, and generates excitement. This tool utilizes a PowerPoint presentation that has been adapted for various constituents.

It was featured at the fall opening workshop for all faculty and staff; at a meeting of the board of trustees; and at the College Council, a representative group of the college community that includes students.

The presentation educates. The slides include the role of The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association; reasons the College of St. Catherine is seeking continued accreditation; details of the College of St. Catherine Self-Study process–committee members, goals of the self-study, schedule, and plan for work; communication plan; details about Higher Learning Commission criteria for accreditation; and an emphasis on assessment.

The presentation engages the community. During presentations, participants built and added to a list of major changes and new initiatives in which the college has been involved since the last self-study. Participants also completed a feedback sheet with specific questions. Responses were forwarded to appropriate self-study committee members to consider in their work.

The presentation generates excitement. Building the list of changes was an important strategy for the college as a whole to recognize the changes and progress. It encouraged more cynical members of the community to note the progress and newer members of the college to recognize and respect the changes, and it resulted in everyone having a sense of the dynamic progress of the college.

A communication plan was implemented in January 2002, the second year of the self-study. The communication plan is based on a commitment to share information on a regular basis with all critical constituents and includes an interactive Web site, updates in the weekly college newsletter, and personal communication from the leadership of the self-study to targeted constituents.

At the start of the second year of our self-study process and one year prior to the visit, we can say that this model has captured people's interest and that the self-study continues to be on people's radar screen. The ethos of examining what we do and why we do it has become part of everyday conversation and people's work, not just for work cited in the self-study, but for meaningful systemic change in the organization.

The comments following the all-college faculty and staff presentation, which occurred during the second of three days of the required orientation for faculty and staff in August, are representative. People commented that they expected to be bored, but that they were excited about the presentation, feel ownership in the process, and are committed to being involved.

It is a challenge to educate and sustain commitment and involvement of the college campus during a self-study process. This model, which includes an easily adapted PowerPoint presentation, has been an effective strategy in launching the self-study process at the College of St. Catherine.

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Eight Weeks to Go! (and Counting!) What to Do *After* You Have Submitted Your Self-Study

Linda Duttlinger
L. Edward Bednar

Chapter 10 in the Second Edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation* provides a detailed checklist of different activities in preparation for a comprehensive visit. The checklist stops when the self-study is submitted and continues after the visit is over. What happens in between those two events is the most crucial part of the visit. The last eight weeks are an essential time period in preparing an institution for the visit of a Commission team.

The last eight weeks are crucial to a successful visit. However, like so many aspects of the comprehensive visit, a little planning can help make things go smoothly and lead to a successful visit. The self-study coordinator continues to work with many different audiences and strives to keep them all informed, included, and reasonably happy with the situation.

Introduction

Purdue University North Central (PNC) is a commuter campus of 3,500 students located near Michigan City, Indiana. It is a regional campus of Purdue University and received its first NCA accreditation in 1971. The last comprehensive evaluation by the Commission was held in April 2001.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep the Commission Happy**

- ◇ **Third party comment.** This process of notifying the institution's public of the forthcoming evaluation and inviting comment is described in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, pp. 81-88.
- ◇ **Documentation concerns.** Review the self-study, and list every single document that is mentioned. This material needs to be placed in the Resource Room for the team.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep Your Commission Team Chair Happy**

- ◇ **Possible campus visit before the official visit.** If schedules permit, a pre-visit by the team chair can help both the self-study coordinator and the team chair better prepare for the visit by the whole team.
- ◇ **Frequent communication.** As the team chair reviews the material sent by the institution, concerns and questions naturally arise. Frequent telephone calls or e-mail messages will allow the self-study coordinator to be better prepared and have material available.
- ◇ **Schedule agreement.** The team chair and the coordinator should have a schedule of most large-group meetings and team events before the team arrives. This can simplify the process and allow the team members maximum involvement as soon as they arrive on campus.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep the Commission Team Happy**

Many team chairs would prefer that the institution *not* make contact with team members prior to the visit. This is a topic to raise with the chair. However, the following issues need to be considered either with the chair as the representative of the team or with the individual members as allowed.

- ◇ **Special accommodations and dietary restrictions.** Always ask if there are issues to be considered in these areas, and act accordingly.
- ◇ **Transportation issues.** Call it the Commission version of planes, trains, and automobiles, but how to get the team members from their point of arrival to their accommodations and to the institution will show how well organized this event is or possible problems to review. If team members are driving, don't forget to have parking tags available.
- ◇ **Lodging issues.** Ask to visit the exact rooms they will be using if at all possible! Decide on the issue of the "snack and goodies" basket. Arrange for a meeting room for the team to use at the hotel in the evenings. Check the availability of computer terminal hookups.
- ◇ **Team room and gathering of materials.** Make the team room at the institution comfortable and professional. Frequent recharging of snacks and drinks is always appreciated. So are computer terminals, big tables, office supplies, coat hangers, telephones, and room to spread out. (Six umbrellas were also a big hit one rainy morning!)
- ◇ **Name tags.** This is an opportunity to provide a nice token for their use at your institution. (Remind the campus community to wear their own name tags during the visit!)
- ◇ **Keys.** Provide enough team room keys and, if necessary, building keys, for each team member.
- ◇ **Computer assistance.** Arrange for a computer technician to be available for the inevitable problems. A brief introduction to the computer system for your institution on the first morning would also be appropriate.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep Your Administration Happy**

- ◇ **Information on team members.** Gather information about the professional activities of the team members and about their home campuses. The Commission staff will provide background information on each team member; institutional information is available on the Internet. Put this in a folder, and let your administration read up on who they will be meeting. Now, make a second folder about your administrators and present that to the team chair for the same courtesy. This exchange of professional information allows both groups to be more at ease. The campus information (especially about size, mission, etc.) is especially helpful.
- ◇ **Date line and potential schedule.** Your campus administrators need information about what happens when and what their individual responsibilities will be with the team. Most are more than willing to cooperate, but need timely information to prevent scheduling conflicts.
- ◇ **Meeting room reservations.** Well in advance of the visit, reserve as many meeting rooms as possible—of all sizes—on your campus for team use during the visit.
- ◇ **Post visit information and dates to remember.** The comprehensive visit does not end when the team leaves the institution. Reports need to be written, drafts read, and timely responses provided to material. Keep a timeline for your administrators to use to plan their activities, and keep them current on the accreditation process.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep the Self-Study Committee Members Happy**

It is a natural reaction to relax after the self-study has been submitted. Many committee members believe their work is completed when the document leaves the institution. Nothing is farther from the truth!

- ◇ **Information.** Keep the self-study team fully informed of what still needs to be done and what deadlines are still approaching. Encourage them to wear their Commission pins during the visit to help the team identify them for possible assistance.
- ◇ **Involvement.** The individuals who wrote the self-study are the same individuals who will need to explain their comments, review their work, and answer the team's concerns. Remind the committee members to review what has been written and identify possible areas for team questions.
- ◇ **Delegation and assignments.** Team visits always need hosts and hostesses, people to introduce them at open meetings, and knowledgeable campus guides. The members of the self-study committee are natural choices for these positions. Invite individuals to volunteer to help out during the visit.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep Your Campus Audience Happy**

- ◇ **Newspaper articles (campus and community).** The arrival and visit of the team should be considered a major event and should receive full press coverage. Arrangements may need to be made concerning any campus interviews. Articles about accreditation, the Commission, and the campus's history with the Commission should precede the visit. The team visit should come as no surprise to anyone in the campus community.
- ◇ **Bulletin boards and display cases.** Now is the perfect time to fill the display cases and cover the bulletin boards with any accreditation material available. Prominent display of previous Self-Study Reports indicates the campus history with accreditation and provides a visual reminder to the campus of what is about to take place. Different academic sections may wish to include information about discipline-specific accreditation agencies that are used. (This is also a perfect time to remove outdated announcements, yellowed cartoons, and tattered clippings from view, too!)
- ◇ **Posters.** How about a contest? Posters that are specific to the team visit are always appropriate. Consider using the dates and team members' names and campus affiliations on the posters. Dates and times of open meetings may also be possible poster items.
- ◇ **Voice mail and e-mail reminders.** Use a countdown technique to remind everyone on campus that the team is coming!!! (and coming *very soon!*)
- ◇ **Updates at all campus meetings.** Try to get the team visit on as many meeting agendas as possible.
- ◇ **Publicity and visibility.** Keeping the visit as a publicized and highly visible event is a major task but is well worth the effort. Everyone on campus needs to know that the team is coming and what they will be doing once they arrive.

☐ **Things You Need to Do to Keep Your Custodial Staff Happy**

- ◇ **Team room.** The people responsible for the team room need to know what is happening and how best to respond to the team's needs and concerns.
- ◇ **Meeting rooms and setup details.** Discuss with the team chair special arrangements that are needed to make any large-group meetings successful. A floor plan of possible chair or table arrangements may help both the team and the custodial staff do their best.
- ◇ **Open meetings.** Previous history at such accreditation meetings will give the best indication of possible attendance. These meetings are frequently the most public view of the team and need to be as well organized as possible.
- ◇ **Food and beverage concerns.** These concerns vary from campus to campus and team to team. Discuss any pressing issues (dietary restrictions, etc.) with the team chair. Teams may want meetings over meals or prefer lighter fare throughout the day. Guidance for the caterer will always be appreciated.

Conclusion

The self-study coordinator is the key person in a successful comprehensive visit. Communication with various audiences becomes crucial in the last eight weeks before the team arrives for its visit. This is not the time to relax and rejoice because the self-study is now finished. This is the time to finish the job and keep everyone else informed and involved. A successful team visit is the result of careful planning, attention to detail, and campus involvement of all concerned.

To the Self-Study Coordinator

No one on your campus will exceed your own level of enthusiasm, interest, and concern about the team visit. Lead by example!

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Nuts/Nutz, and Boldz: The Creation of a Focused Resource Room– Environment, Profiles, and Potpourri

Clare S. Lawlor

Introduction

This paper describes the importance of environment creation and collegial working relationships for those persons who are creating a site visit Resource Room. It is important to focus on environment creation and strategies for personnel management in any specific school setting. I will provide concrete organizational tips and discuss strategies that will assist specific in-house personnel in the completion of the Resource Room. First, however, it is essential to capture the essence of this creative activity in the form of images and narrative.

Snapshots

Occasionally, in the sometimes reverie of the past, I peruse snapshots of my childhood. I recall the Brownie or Kodak Flashcube cameras that produced the crimped, dated photos. One picture portrays a little girl in a dressy outfit standing in the front yard in the early spring sunshine under an apple tree in bloom. The shadows reveal a connection with less visible elements in the yard such as a sandbox framed by the curlicues of honeysuckle vines and trailing roses and the briefest glimpse of a child's high chair.

One informal viewer may judge this snapshot as an artifact of an earlier past, an artifact worthy only of a quick glance. Another observer may view the snapshot, decoding wholes and details from the black, white, and varying shades of gray. Perhaps, this second observer gives a brief second glance, noting the child's evident delight. Judgment rendered, however: just another aged snapshot of the past.

The person in the picture, honeysuckled fragrances, textured tree bark, wet sand, scratchy crinoline, woven straw hat, lace gloves, bright sun, breezy, sprouting green "grasslings," and, what the viewer cannot see or sense, the relationship of the subject, daughter, with the photographer, "Daddy," begin to capture the sensory depth of the snapshot for me, the involved subject.

Non-descript black, white, and gray, encoded in brief moments by the casual observer, is a rich and living memory of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste for the subject, who is deeply involved in the experience through multiple senses. This transformation is the challenging task of Resource Room creation.

The Challenge

This snapshot recollection juxtaposing two- with three-dimensional experiences describes the sensory and organizational challenge of creating a living Resource Room. The challenge can be described as:

> The translation of the two-dimensional, black, white, and grayness of the casual observer/participant into the full experience of the three-dimensional colorful and sensual (use of all of the senses) elements that describe the

artistic essence and solid substance of our educational programs and enterprises under Higher Learning Commission review.

It is essential to believe and act upon the truth that human persons, Resource Room team members, are the artists and creators who embody a myriad of resources and connections that address and meet this challenge.

Sensory Processes, Learning, and Creation

The human brain is the best-organized, most functional three pounds of matter in the known universe (Sylwester 1995, 1). It is here that we begin to imagine how to use the brain's resources in creating a multidimensional Resource Room environment and experience for the Commission visitors.

Review and assimilate these facts about the sensory encoding of information:

- Our eyes, the site of 70% of our body's sensory receptors, begin the cognitive process of transforming reflected light into a mental image of the objects that reflect the light. (Sylwester 1995, 610)
- The ears are our "24-hour" monitoring service. (Sylwester 1995, 63)
- Our sense of touch develops early and is stimulated by physical contact with the surrounding environment…Tactile stimulation is like rubbing the world on the outside layer of the brain. (Sylwester 1995, 65)
- Smell is more important than taste in our recognition and selection of food. (Sylwester 1995, 66)
- Our sense of taste is as social as it is biological in that we generally prefer to eat and drink with others. Eating is much more than taste. It's a rich mix of all the senses: the cooking aromas, the tactile crunch of celery and apples, and the attractiveness of food on the table, the sounds of popcorn, and the flow of conversation. (Sylwester 1995, 67)

We assimilate information in the integration of these sensory processes. They become "like breathing," essential to life, but hardly noticed. Our job as Resource Room artists is to incorporate and illuminate these sensory aspects of human functioning into all of the concrete areas that a Resource Room represents. When evaluating the team's work, think about the sensory expression of the product. Are the materials about the athletic program visually, auditorily (video), tactility, etc., fully expressive of the program? Are marketing items and familiar items displayed? Those candy sale chocolates? A gustatory favorite!

During the team processes, accomplish tasks through a focus on key questions taken from adult learning literature:

- What are the significant questions?
- What is surprising?
- What are the significant learnings?

These questions assume that the adult participants in the Resource Room project bring their own life experiences to the task and integrates them into this process of questioning and creation. When "stuck," use these simple but powerful questions to refocus your group on the particular task at hand.

Environment Construction and Sensory Integration

Montouri and Conti state:

> The process of ongoing creation requires an accompanying process of ongoing learning. If we are to simply to reproduce that which already is, all we need are certain existing skills and competencies, some memorized routines, and off we go. But if we are to create new worlds and new relationships, we need more than the existing stockpile of knowledge. We need to learn how to learn. We need to figure out what is useful to us and how to get the appropriate knowledge. We need to understand how to deal with the unforeseen. We need to develop sensitivity to our surroundings. (1933, 155)

Rathburn, Weyers, and Rafn (2001, 359), in "Envision Your NCA Visit: How Little Things Mean a Lot," state that visualization is an important activity in preparing for a Commission visit. In their setting, the Resource Room team visualized the organization of the room, the order of the resources, and the amenities long before the visit occurred. Environment creation contains integrated sensory, organizational, administrative, and artistic elements and experiences for the site team. Each element can be visualized and integrated to create both a cognitive and interpersonal cohesion.

Some very practical environmental ideas follow.

- ☐ **Rooms and location**
  - ◇ Locate several *rooms* that would work for your creation.
    - ○ Consider size, accessibility, flexibility, windows, and campus views. Identify a room or rooms that are not in heavily traveled areas of the building so the evaluators may have some sense of privacy in their deliberations.
    - ○ Explore all of the possibilities, plan ahead, schedule the room, and have an alternate room identified.
    - ○ Make sure that your self-study coordinator and administration are fully informed and fully supportive of space usage. Horror stories can emerge when space is not protected adequately for this project. Check in often. Very often!
  - ◇ Use visualization processes to support the flexibility of the Resource Room team. Conduct an exercise that involves creating a number of blueprints for the room.
    - ○ Use quadrille paper as an aid in working out the floor plan.
    - ○ Do a visualization exercise to relax your team and encourage the imagining of what is possible. This is difficult for many persons to do as they live in a "boxed" world. Encourage them to think beyond the limitations of the present circumstances. It's amazing what can happen and what unknown but available resources can be found to put those imaginings into practice. Think about this example:

> The Resource Room team is meeting to think about the furniture in the room. One team member states that there is nothing they can do about the worn, ugly furniture in the room. The team leader asks the team to relax, deeply breathe, imagine the most perfect Resource Room furniture, and jot notes or draw what they see.
>
> Several members describe office furniture and several overstuffed, comfortable chairs for relaxation. One member has several comfortable chairs at home that can be used for the visit. Another member has a neighbor who runs an office supply company and might be willing to lend his floor office furniture for the visit. A third member is aware of suitable furniture on the campus that is not being used. A fourth member can offer transport of these items to the Resource Room.

- ☐ **Budget**
  - ◇ Approach your immediate supervisor to ascertain the funds available for the Resource Room project. It is essential to have available funds for material and amenities. Create a budget with your team, and discuss it with your supervisor. Allow a contingency category for unexpected expenses. Be realistic. Don't cut corners on the need for financial backing by your administration. Remind them that this is one of the rooms in which important accreditation decisions will be made.

- ☐ **Room furnishings**
  - ◇ Furniture
  - ◇ Texture: moderate color, comfort, and arrangement.
  - ◇ Who has the most elegantly furnished home on your team? Utilize their skills in this aspect of environment creation.
  - ◇ Practical suggestions when working on a small budget:
    - ○ Furniture covers can be made quite easily from patterns and materials that can include a coordinated palette of colors. Who on the faculty can sew? Get him or her involved.
    - ○ Borrow lamps, mirrors, table coverings, vases, etc.

☐ **Art and photographs**

- ◇ *Visual:* What does the college/university photograph that captures the specific essence and substance of the programs, students, faculty, administration, etc.? How are the photos formatted? Ask the team about who can do photography, and format a series of pictures for the walls of the Resource Room. Remember that the formatters need to connect with the furnishing persons so a harmonious palette of colors will result from their work.
- ◇ *Remember to think of the whole faculty and staff in recruiting resources for the room.*
- ◇ What about a display of student art? Student writing? Student whatever? Place some in the Resource Room and some in the areas leading to the room. Again, remember that harmonious palette of colors. It's very important to have persons with artistic talent working with and/or reviewing the concrete products in order to support a professional ambience for the room.
- ◇ Take photographs of the steering committee at work on various aspects of the process. A running journal to go with the pictures demonstrates involvement, progress, humor, expected difficulties, and the hard work of the educational community devoted to the project.

☐ **Technology**

- ◇ The site team may accomplish many of its writing tasks in the Resource Room. Have enough PCs in the room in order to accommodate each member of the team.
- ◇ Work with your technology people to create an organized area of the Resource Room that is easily accessible but affords some privacy, since as personnel other than the team may visit the room.
- ◇ LOCK your room at all times prior to the visit so that materials and machinery don't "walk away."

☐ **Flowers/Plants**

- ◇ Smell: Living plants and semi-fragrant flowers give an elegant touch and provide a slight fragrance to the room, providing an environmental fragrance to connect with positive evaluations.

☐ **Food**

- ◇ *Smell, taste, texture,* and variety are important. Vary your offerings. Include vegetable and fruit trays as well as sweets. Chocolate, however, helps.
- ◇ Arrangement and accessibility are important. The point person needs to be available during the visit to refresh the amenities while the team is away from the room on an evaluation task. Inquire about any special needs.

☐ **Personal**

- ◇ Small, decorative mirror.
- ◇ Access to restrooms–condition of restrooms.
- ◇ Kleenex.
- ◇ Phones with "how to use" information.

☐ **Materials Presentation**

- ◇ Binders:
    - ○ Color-key binders to the key elements of the visit; use coordinated special papers for the cover and spine.
    - ○ Create a numbering system so that the evaluators can easily ascertain the position of the information. Display in several areas of the room and give a copy to each evaluator.
    - ○ Check with the furnishing folks to determine the paper design and folder colors that add to the room's inviting palette of colors.
    - ○ Use a similar format when possible.

☐ **Personnel**

- "Gopher": a KEY person with easy access and a gracious manner who will find all of those inevitably forgotten aspects and will douse the fires as they occur. Work with your chairperson around this issue. Make sure that your room is covered during the whole visit.

Personnel Strategies and Cognitive Interfaces

The process of adequate content collection for display in the Resource Room requires the team to think carefully about the involved players. These players include program managers, library personnel, admissions personnel, faculty persons, administrative personnel, vice presidents of finance and student services, and presidents. Think about the players in your setting. I have found that metaphors are useful constructs in conceptualizing the unique challenges presented by these constituencies. The following descriptions may be useful. Particularize them to your setting.

- **Lucy's Booth**
  - *Thinking style:* often linear with some flexibility.
  - *Perspective:* "My reputation is at stake here!"
    "Who's in my office now?"
  - *Approach:* deferential; make recommendations, describe clear expectations and accurate timelines. Bring chocolate. Listen and soothe unspoken anxiety.
- **Mary Moribund**
  - *Thinking style:* linear, highly detail oriented, singular concerns.
  - *Perspective:* "Binders? I have three ready...five more tomorrow."
    "What...leave a book in the Resource Room?"
  - *Approach:* They already have it done. Give them the materials and layout. Act as a consultant (but don't forget about them!). Clear timelines.
- **Frieda Frazzeledish**
  - *Thinking style:* linear and nonlinear; flexible; multiple worldviews.
  - *Perspective:* "Tell me, what was it you wanted me to do?"
    "You must be kidding...in the middle of recruiting?"
  - *Approaches:* Meet often; structure suggestions; create uses for admissions materials. Deadline reminders one week before they are due.
- **Martin's Mellow Fellows**
  - *Thinking styles:* linear, nonlinear, linearity totally missing. *Fuzzy boundaries,"* multiple perspectives (not usually multiple personalities); ranges from strict rigidity to its opposite; dependent.
  - *Perspectives:* "Why me? Fred and Alice would do a better job."
  - *Approaches:* Respect and utilize individual expertise. Suggest structure for creativity. Direct "orders" to obstinate rigidity. Group work.
- **Carl Crane-Leggs and Marcia Microscopes**
  - *Thinking styles:* linear; theory X, autocratic; theory Y, collaborative.
  - *Perspectives:* "What, more money? What in the #!*&#! do these people want? It better be a ten-year accreditation! It's your responsibility!!"
  - *Approaches:* Close, timely communication with steering committee chairperson; practical, useful solutions to problems; enlist their assistance; urge involvement.

These metaphoric images serve as an example of thoughtful and humorous strategies that are individualized to the worldview of all of the players on the Resource Room team. Think about your set of players. Draw up a list of players, metaphors, visual images, thinking styles, and approaches. Strategize to achieve the best content. Results are a product of both knowledge and specialized approaches.

Conclusions

The transformation from a two- to a three-dimensional Resource Room "snapshot" occurs as the result of the relationships built with the environment and between the players whose content contributions add color, hues, structure, clarity, and depth to the Resource Room. Careful attention to the creation of a functional and creative Resource Room environment presents efficiency, comfort, and a sense of welcome to the site team; welcome to the environment, players, and creative enterprise of education in your setting. Attention to the multiple senses and multiple contributors will clearly serve the processes and outcomes of the site visit accreditation team.

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Back from the Brink: A Comprehensive Visit on the Heels of Institutional Catastrophe

Jerome V. Martin
Bruce Batterson

Preparation for a comprehensive visit is normally a very challenging activity for any college or university. In the case of Peru State College's most recent comprehensive visit, the normal pressures were substantially amplified by significant turmoil on the campus and proposals to move or close the school. The turmoil resulted in a complete change in senior leadership at the college. An interim leadership team began the process of responding to political pressures and preparing for the scheduled North Central Association (soon to be The Higher Learning Commission) accreditation visit, as well as state and national accreditation team visits for the college's teacher education program. Interim presidents (a total of three—a situation that further complicated this effort) and their leadership group emphasized campus-wide involvement in a strategic planning process and the use of accreditation standards and guidelines to shape the college's response in the political arena. The new president, Dr. Ben Johnson, rebuilt the leadership team and used the initial strategic planning effort to establish a positive direction for the college and as a foundation for accreditation preparation. The strategic planning process with an integrated emphasis on accreditation standards produced a successful response to the challenges faced by the college and led to successful accreditation visits.

Background

Peru State College is a small rural campus, one of three schools in the Nebraska State College System, governed by a board of trustees, with additional oversight from the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. During the 1990s, the college had overcome serious financial difficulties (the topic of a focused visit by the Commission in 1994) and had shown steady growth in students, with an on-campus enrollment of approximately one thousand and off-campus enrollment of approximately eight hundred. In 1997–1998, members of the board of trustees proposed that the college move to a larger community in an effort to increase student enrollment and to improve access to the urban centers of Lincoln and Omaha. In addition, supporters of the move argued that repair and maintenance needs on the existing campus were so substantial that it would be cheaper to build a new campus at another location. The estimated costs to build a new campus were subsequently shown to be unrealistically low, which in turn led some in state government to recommend that the cheapest option would be to close the college.

When the media revealed the proposed relocation plan, a firestorm developed within the Peru State College community and among southeast Nebraska communities. Some supported the proposed move as a way to enhance the college and to address the state government's concerns about budgeting and productivity. Many others opposed moving the college, citing its heritage as the oldest college in Nebraska, the beauty of the campus, and the appeal of the small rural setting to students. The secrecy of the initial planning process and the lack of full public discussion intensified the opposition. In spite of the opposition, in January 1998 the board of trustees voted unanimously to pursue the move. Under the pressures of the debate over the future of the campus, significant interpersonal issues broke open in the college community, and eventually both the president and the vice president for academic affairs were removed from their positions. An interim leadership team was assembled in the summer of 1998 with the multiple tasks of responding to the political discussion of the college's future, stabilizing the campus community, and preparing for the accreditation visits scheduled for the 2000–2001 school year.

The heated public debate over the future location of Peru State College caused the state government to intervene. The Nebraska legislature directed the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education to conduct a viability study of the college. The governor also expressed concerns over the situation at the college. The resulting study went beyond the issue of campus location to include an analysis of the educational needs of the college's designated service region, nineteen counties in southeast Nebraska. As the Coordinating Commission study evolved, it became clear that the issues were much broader than simply moving the college or keeping it in its current location. The study also included consideration of the possibility of closing the college and providing educational services to southeast Nebraska through alternative means. Eventually the issue evolved to one of keeping the college open on the existing campus or closing it in the interest of saving the state the cost of facility upgrades and continuing operational costs.

The college's interim leadership worked aggressively to counter the negative potential of the study, especially the option of closing the oldest postsecondary school in the state. The leadership team developed a strategy of taking the initiative in the process and not simply responding to the outside challenges. This effort resulted in a strategic planning process that would demonstrate that the college was responding to the concerns that had been raised in the debates and that it was a viable academic institution. Additionally, accreditation standards were emphasized in the planning process as a means of strengthening the rationale for the approach and to ensure that the activities served the dual purpose of starting the self-study process. The leadership team also used this opportunity to emphasize to the campus community that accreditation standards are not just in place for the periodic visits, but should set the professional framework for all college activities. The strategic planning process also helped bring the campus community back together to begin forming a common vision of the future of the college.

The Strategic Planning Process

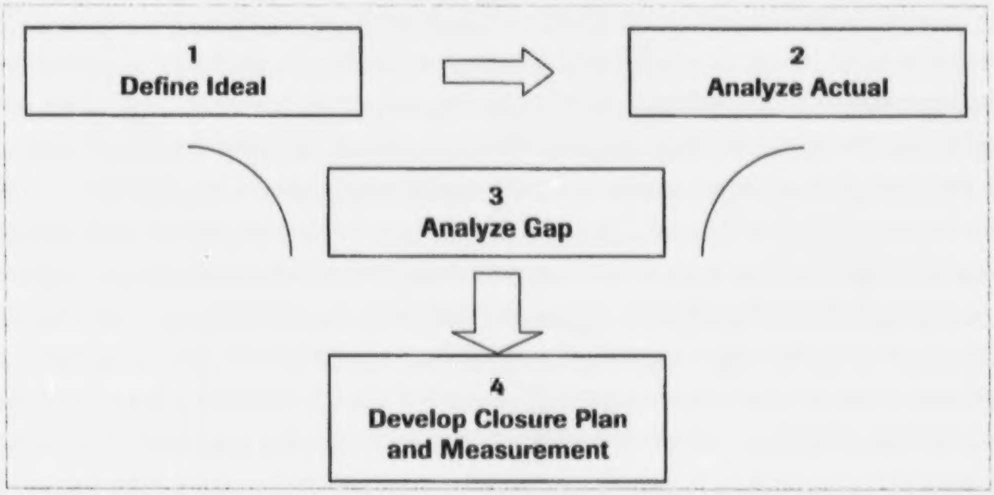
The leadership team emphasized participation by virtually the entire campus community and key stakeholders from surrounding communities. The interim president asked all employees to volunteer for a planning committee and ensured that each faculty member served on one of the committees. The committees were chaired or co-chaired by faculty members. The chairs of the committees also served on a steering committee that helped integrate the input from the working teams. The committee structure was based on general areas of concern that had to be addressed with the Coordinating Commission:

- Institutional vision and objectives
- Facilities
- Academic programs
- Personnel
- Student issues (especially recruiting and retention)
- Off-campus programs

The president charged each committee to be very open-minded and to seek out new opportunities for the college. He also directed the committees to become aware of the accreditation standards and to actively use them in developing assessments and proposals for the strategic plan. During the introductory session for the strategic planning effort, the college leadership gave each committee member a copy of the North Central Association Criteria for Accreditation and the General Institutional Requirements. The college also provided information on the standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The integration of accreditation standards at this point strengthened the effort and, more important, it began the formal preparation for the accreditation visits.

The leadership team used the "gap analysis" or "discrepancy" model as the framework for the strategic planning process. An outside facilitator trained the participants and guided them through early portions of the process. Using the analytical model, the college leadership asked the participants to engage in brainstorming sessions and to develop a vision of an ideal Peru State College, with emphasis on the area of responsibility for their respective committees. The committees then developed an assessment of where the college actually was in relation to their expectations. Finally, the committees identified specific steps needed to move the college from the actual toward the ideal. (See Figure 1 for the planning model.)

Figure 1. The Strategic Planning Process



As the planning activities evolved, teams were asked to develop areas of focus, which the final plan identified as key outcome planning areas. The teams developed a series of specific objectives and measurement standards for each area. The seven areas were:

- Educational service to southeast Nebraska
- Student enrollment and retention
- Efficient and effective campus operations
- Faculty and staff development
- Campus governance
- Alumni and foundation support
- Community relationships

Although these broad categories responded to the concerns raised in the Coordinating Commission study, the objectives and measurables were shaped by accreditation standards and provided a strong beginning for the college's self-study effort. Additionally, the integration of accreditation agency materials into this process helped educate the campus community on the value and relevance of accreditation guidance in the ongoing operations of a college. The very visible emphasis on accreditation standards added to the strength of the strategic plan and supporting presentations as the college made its case to the governing body, the state, concerned citizens, and interest groups. Peru State College presented the strategic plan to the board of trustees, the Coordinating Commission, and the Nebraska legislature. These agencies accepted the strategic plan and proposed follow-up reports as the foundation for their determination to continue the campus in its current location.

While the campus focused on the planning process, the board of trustees conducted a nationwide search for a new president of Peru State College. The board hired Dr. Ben E. Johnson on May 27, 1999. During the 1999–2000 academic year, Dr. Johnson rebuilt the senior leadership of the college and implemented a partial reorganization. During the 2000–2001 academic year, he continued to build the new leadership team and to restructure and redesign policies and procedures to support continued growth of the college. Additionally, he oversaw preparation for state and National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education visits that were scheduled in the spring of 2001 and a comprehensive Higher Learning Commission visit in October 2001.

Accreditation Preparation

Although the formal preparation time for the accreditation visits was shorter than what might otherwise be desired, the college was able to draw on the work done for the strategic plan to build the self-studies. The strategic plan was indeed a first phase in the preparation process. This fact was emphasized when the college invited the Commission staff liaison officer to campus in the fall of 1999, and he provided positive feedback on the use of the strategic planning process as preparation for the comprehensive visit. Committees built around the Criteria for Accreditation conducted the formal self-study effort. The college used an executive committee and a faculty editor to integrate the committees' work into a coherent whole. The self-study committees relied very heavily on the work done for the strategic plan. Additionally, the self-study effort benefited from the college's commitment to provide a series of regular reports to the board of trustees, the Coordinating Commission, and the legislature. These reports documenting the college's progress were very valuable in the preparation of the Self-Study Report. The extensive use of accreditation information during the planning process also helped create a better understanding of and appreciation for the role and value of accreditation. This awareness blended into the informational component of the preparation for the Higher Learning Commission visit. Update sessions at the start of each semester in the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years and in August 2001, two months prior to the team visit, reinforced the connection between the strategic plan and accreditation standards.

The political struggle involving the future of the campus and the internal conflicts associated with this situation highlighted significant challenges that faced Peru State College. The strategic planning process and the integration of the accreditation standards did not solve all of these challenges, but it helped the college develop a positive momentum. The college has subsequently generated significant support from the Nebraska legislature in the form of increased funding for maintenance projects and major construction projects and from alumni and supporters who have significantly increased support through the College Foundation. The planning process was also responsible for positive accreditation team visits. The evaluation teams recognized that the college had made significant progress, and they concurred in concerns that the college had identified. Although The Higher Learning Commission report has not been finalized or approved, the college expects to be granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years and a focused visit on two areas that had been identified as concerns in the strategic plan and in the Self-Study Report. This is a remarkable result given the situation on the campus just three years prior, when many people in the state of Nebraska believed that Peru State College would be closed. The rebirth of Peru State College and the accreditation success was the product of hard work by dedicated members of the campus community and the strength of a strategic planning process that fully integrated the professional educational standards of the accrediting agencies.

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Using Traditional Self-Study as a Catalyst for Change

Ruth Kurlandsky
Donald Boyer

Background

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is one of the oldest two-year colleges in the nation. It was founded in 1914 to serve as a feeder school to the University of Michigan. Originally administratively housed as the thirteenth and fourteenth grades of the Grand Rapids Public School System, its tradition of strong, academic, liberal arts was established at the beginning. After World War II it began to grow by adding evening courses and vocational curricula. In the 1960s it came under new community college legislation. In 1991 the community voted to establish an independent community college with its own board of trustees, and Grand Rapids Junior College metamorphosed into Grand Rapids Community College.

Services that had been provided by the public school system had to be taken over by the college. These services included such offices as personnel, payroll, benefits, maintenance, information systems, and security. As you can imagine, much energy and many financial resources were used in getting things set up. A comprehensive visit in 1991 found very few weaknesses; it was believed that all issues of concern would be resolved by the new political structure of the college, resulting from the vote to "free'" the college from the K-12 system. By 1995 the college was becoming more of a college, and reorganizing to better meet its mission, independent of the public school structure. It was clear that work was needed in the academic realm, which had been left to faculty to "keep on being excellent" for many years. Then, of course, the next scheduled comprehensive NCA visit loomed.

Belief in Excellence

Our college has a long tradition of excellence. Many people believed that we were doing everything well, so who would need accreditation? And since accreditation would make us change, why would we want it? There were others who believed in the power of change and improvement, and of using standards and data-based decision making. On campus, there was one person serving as an NCA Consultant-Evaluator, and one dean who listened to her concerns. They are making the presentation at this meeting.

Process

During a reorganization, the person serving as an NCA C-E was appointed the self-study chair for the next comprehensive visit, with four years to go. She spent most of an academic year meeting with more than five hundred different people, explaining the NCA accreditation process and the role of a self-study committee. She encouraged people in all areas of the college to take on voluntary activities, and to apply to serve on the committee. And in the meantime, she had managed to arrange a budget for the committee that included a generous travel allotment, so that committee members could attend the NCA Annual Meeting.

By February, twenty-nine people were appointed by the president to serve on the self-study committee. They represented all the bargaining units at the college. While there was an effort to reach 50 percent faculty involvement, this was tough! We came close, but many of these energetic and future-thinking faculty members were promoted over the years. We also encouraged applications from people at least five years from retirement, thinking to achieve stability on a long-term committee. Turnover turned out to be nearly 50 percent by the time we switched to AQIP.

What led to change?

- **Appointment by the president.** In a traditional, hierarchically oriented institution, it is important for people not only to volunteer, but to be confirmed, or officially appointed, by the boss.
- **Widespread representation.** Writing a self-study for the purpose of institutional improvement, rather than for the purpose of getting it over with, requires broad input. Even more than input, what worked for us was widespread learning, about accreditation in general, about NCA expectations, and about what was happening in all areas of our own institution.
- **Travel.** We managed to take between eighteen and twenty people to Chicago to the NCA Annual Meeting, and over the course of four years, sent twelve different people (limit three per institution per year) to the self-study workshop before the Annual Meeting. What was most important was the learning that people brought back with them; it was discovery in style, and did not require depending on the self-study chair to "lecture." In addition, everyone who went to an Annual Meeting met people from other schools. This was invaluable in identifying not only our own strengths, but also weaknesses and possible approaches to dealing with them.
- **Learning, learning, learning.** Our site visits have been 1959 (apparently a pilot), 1964, 1974, 1984, and 1991. Several people have said, "I'll retire before I go through that again!" In a culture where reports are often written "for the shelf," it was extremely helpful to have people learn about Commission standards for themselves and begin to apply the learning to ongoing work.

☐ What We Did First

The first thing we did was look at our own performance as it related to the General Institutional Requirements. Many people think that an institution up for reaccreditation would have met the GIRs at the beginning and would have no need to go back and look at them. On the other hand, GRCC was founded long before there were GIRs. In addition, the GIRs had changed in 1993, so there was every reason to do a "check-up" on them. The first cohort of attendees at the self-study workshop and the self-study chair (four people) decided that the whole twenty-nine person committee should look at the GIRs. We spend the next academic year doing so, in the typical subcommittee approach. We found ourselves in some trouble in four areas, and wrote not only a report but a suggestion for resolution.

What led to change? What motivated faculty and staff to move forward on the NCA process and start to look at ways to improve the organization?

- The people who volunteer to be on a self-study committee are not really interested in just writing a Self-Study Report. They want to be involved in the improvement of the institution. Developing recommendations for change is where their hearts are.
- There are politics no matter where you are. The "highest-ranking" person on the self-study committee was able to assist the self-study chair in bringing the report to the president and his cabinet. While there was some sentiment for simply quashing the report, the president agreed that it should be published to the whole campus and that action should be taken. That action began to take place outside the self-study committee, in areas that were appropriate to the function.
- Self-study committee members need to serve as advisors and active participants in areas of improvement. Otherwise, they feel that their work is not valued. It was important to keep the committee motivated as change began to occur, but their role was to write a full Self-Study Report.

☐ Commission Staff Liaison Visit

We invited our staff liaison to campus for a two-day visit. He spoke to our administrative council, our academic leadership group, the self-study team, and some smaller groups. Institutions are entitled to this service, free of charge.* What we learned is that the staff liaison needs to be thoroughly briefed on the situation at the particular institution. Ours, unfortunately, said, "Well, you're an old institution; you don't need to worry about the GIRs." But, we did!

☐ What Happened Next

A long-standing faculty association/administration contract dispute was settled. The atmosphere on campus became less acrimonious and people began to be willing to change. One of the items agreed to in the contract was an improved faculty evaluation system. This was partly related to the work of the self-study committee around the GIRs about faculty.

Then, the long-term president announced his retirement in the middle of the two-day visit by our NCA staff liaison. To his credit, he was able to turn on a dime: from talking about using self-study as a vehicle to re-energize for change, to using self-study as a briefing for a new president.

There is a tendency for an institution to "hold its breath" while waiting for the search committee to do its work. This happened to us: we lost the better part of two academic years in uncertainty and unwillingness to move forward.

Over the years, however, learning continued. We sent three people to the self-study workshop, the day before the annual meeting, each year. We formed a steering team of those who had been to the self-study workshop to guide the work of the team of twenty-nine, and especially to continue the work over the summers when it was difficult to convene the whole team.

Once the new president was hired, things began rolling again. This president has a participatory style and is interested in quality methods. The self-study committee took on the task of looking at various quality models, such as the Michigan Quality Award and the Baldrige Quality Award criteria. We worked through the steps in the quality award application process and reviewed the pros and cons of quality models.

What led to change?

- New leadership willing to "expose" and deal with the need for continuous improvement and participatory decision making. My favorite quote from a college president: "The largest room at the institution is the room for improvement."
- Learning, learning, learning. The self-study team had learned about NCA requirements and expectations, and had looked at quality models. Our business and technical training unit also undertook ISO 9000 certification, and comparisons were made to that.

AQIP

Coincidentally, NCA began formulating the concept of the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). The self-study team recommended to the president that we apply to be in the AQIP group, and move to using quality models to guide institutional improvement. At the same time, the president instituted strategic planning using large-scale engagement, creating a microcosm of the entire campus each year. It is larger now, but follows the model originally established by the self-study team. The first task that the microcosm project engaged in was development of a new mission statement, accompanied by vision, values, and ends. Community input, as well as hard data, was used throughout the process. All of the work was done under the leadership of the board of trustees, using the policy governance model, and was driven by continuous quality principles.

- **Why did GRCC apply to join the AQIP project?** In spring 1999, members of the self-study team began to hear reports from other colleges that had shown great success in making system-wide transformational improvement by using a quality approach to reaccreditation. After careful research and study, it was determined that GRCC would be an excellent candidate for this new approach. Our new mission, vision, values, and ends statements and strategic plan positioned us perfectly to take advantage of this alternative method of accreditation offered by NCA.

- **The AQIP application process.** Official discussions with NCA staff began in the summer of 1999. For eighteen months, the self-study team worked toward acceptance into the AQIP pilot. It was not an easy process. Colleges applying to be accepted into AQIP must demonstrate that they are committed to using quality improvement principles, values, and tools.

- **How Do the Michigan Quality Award and Pacesetter Award Fit?**

  Since the AQIP project requires that a participating college also be actively involved in a state or national quality award system, the last piece to fall into place was the notification that GRCC was to receive the Michigan Quality Council (MQC) Lighthouse Recognition Award on November 16, 2000. We applied for this award after the self-study team completed an internal self-assessment during 1999–2000.

In summer 2001 the college prepared applications for the Michigan Quality Award–Navigator Level and the national Pacesetter Award.

- Accepted to AQIP: November 2000
- Lighthouse Award (Michigan Quality program): November 2000
- Navigator Award (next level, Michigan Quality): November 2001
- Pacesetter (CQIN): Written report February 2002
- B&TT ISO registration: pending as of January 2002

Ruth Kurlandsky is Faculty at Grand Rapids Community College in Michigan.

Donald Boyer is Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Grand Rapids Community College in Michigan.

*Ed. note. Beginning in 2001-2001 the Commission charges a modest fee to offset the cost of the staff visit.

Appendix

Grand Rapids Community College
Mission, Vision, Ends and Values Statements

Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide the community with learning opportunities that enable people to achieve their goals.

Vision

Grand Rapids Community College is a vibrant institution of higher education dedicated to enriching peoples' lives and contributing to the vitality of the community.

Ends

We fulfill our mission by accomplishing the following ends:

Community Outreach

We serve the community as a quality educational resource providing leadership in response to the expressed needs of the community.

Flexible Learning

We meet the needs of the community by providing flexible learning opportunities in a timely manner.

Community Partnerships

We actively collaborate with the community through partnerships and services.

Lifelong Learning

We assist persons who want to continue, renew, or enrich their learning throughout their lives.

Developmental Education

We prepare developmental students for college and/or work. All students are encouraged, supported, and given opportunities and the means to reach their goals within their own learning styles.

Transfer and Articulation

We provide quality liberal arts and transfer programs that enable students to continue their education successfully at other institutions.

Diversity

We promote an understanding of diversity for all people in a quality, respectful, motivating environment.

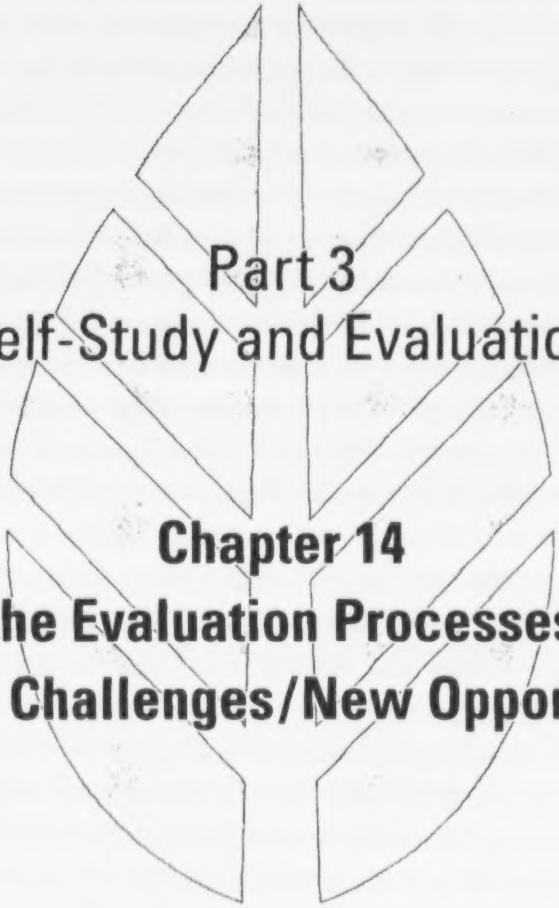
Workforce Development

Students achieve the skills necessary for success in the workplace today, tomorrow, and into the future.

Values

As a college community working to support learners, we value:

- Our community of learners as the essence of our work
- Integrity, accountability, and responsible risk-taking
- A high-quality learning environment that is nurturing and challenging
- A working environment characterized by collaboration and shared responsibility for the whole
- Innovation and creativity
- Diversity and respect for all people
- Strong community connections



Part 3
Self-Study and Evaluation

Chapter 14
The Evaluation Processes: Special Challenges/New Opportunities

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

Engaging the Future:
Vision, Values, and Validation
in the New Educational Marketplace

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

107th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 23 – 26, 2002
Hyatt Regency Chicago

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Institutional Research: An Antidote to Accreditation Anxiety

Trudy Bers
Marsha Krotseng
Sarah B. Lindquist
Gerald McLaughlin

Introduction

Institutional research (IR) offices can play a critical role in institutional self-study processes and the preparation of self-study reports and supporting documents. For example, IR professionals are experts in conducting surveys and special institutional studies; analyzing data from national databases to provide comparative data and information; ensuring data used in the self-study are reliable, consistent, and accurate; and constructing tables and charts for self-study reports and supplementary documents. Some institutions create or invigorate IR offices or functions only when they begin their self-studies, and lack trained personnel who understand how to maximize the value of these offices for accreditation and institutional improvement purposes. This paper suggests ways in which IR can support accreditation processes and reduce the attendant anxiety that often accompanies accreditation activities.

The Connection Between IR and Accreditation

Many individuals involved in self-study processes are anxious about how their institutions will compile, analyze, and present data and information for self-studies and reports. Even where there are sophisticated institutional research offices, many outside of IR don't know what they can, should, or might expect from institutional researchers. Many colleges and universities, especially smaller ones, lack in-house resources or expertise to undertake major accreditation-related studies. This is particularly the case where staff turnover and new accreditation criteria make the project seem virtually *sui generis*.

Institutional research offices and, more importantly, trained IR professionals have knowledge and skills that are essential for conducting high quality self-studies, compiling data and information about student learning outcomes and other aspects of the institution, and presenting findings to diverse constituencies. In examining what IR can bring to the self-study and accreditation process, a number of important related issues are addressed.

What Types of Activities Can Be Expected from IR?

Perhaps one of the best ways to look at areas of activity that IR professionals may engage in is to look at the structure of the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) annual meeting. The AIR Forum is organized into five tracks, four of which cover primary functional areas of a college and one of which deals with infrastructure and professional activities that support the other four. The tracks are:

- **Student life and learning.** Research and practice related to student development and satisfaction, including student academic, social, and emotional gains. Topics include student profiles, performance, satisfaction, expectations, and goals; student learning outcomes; participation in campus activities; the campus climate for students; serving students with special needs; and student diversity.
- **Academic programs, curriculum, and faculty issues.** Issues related to the development and management of academic departments, programs, curriculum, and faculty activities. That is, the kind of information that a faculty member, department chair, dean, or chief academic officer would use in evaluating the status of academic program. Topics include academic program review; pedagogical methods, and programs;

assessment of general education, the major, and the classroom; research and scholarly productivity; public service; tenure policies; faculty recruitment, development, and retention; collective bargaining; salary models; faculty evaluation; and decision making regarding faculty and academic programs.

◇ **Institutional management and planning.** Campus-level planning, evaluation, and management are focuses of this track. This includes the types of information and analyses that would be of primary interest to senior campus-level administrators for campus-wide planning and improvement. Topics include enrollment management (including retention studies); quality improvement; strategic planning; fiscal, physical, and human resources (and their allocation); campus information systems; campus policy formulation; and organizational management and change.

◇ **Higher education collaborations, policy issues, and accountability.** This track emphasizes issues that go beyond the campus, including accountability of individual institutions to external publics, as well as multi-institutional collaborations (e.g., data exchanges, learning consortia, and articulation agreements), system-level issues, and public policy related to higher education. Topics include accreditation; data exchanges and national data resources; system, state, and federal higher education policy; multi-institution cooperative projects and arrangements; and international projects and comparisons.

◇ **The practice of institutional research: theory, techniques, technologies, tools, and ethics.** Activities that focus on the practice of institutional research. This includes organizational, ethical, methodological, and technological aspects of the profession. Topics include organizing and evaluating IR offices and functions; ethical and political dimensions of IR practice; statistics, research, and reporting methods; computer and information technologies for IR work; and data administration and warehousing.

What IR Talents Are Related to Self-Study and Accreditation?

Within the context of IR activities listed above, there are many important contributions IR professionals can bring to self-study and accreditation. Some of these are:

- Ensuring reliable, consistent, and accurate data
- Understanding and using national databases and national sources of data, such as IPEDS, NSF, OERI, NPEC, to create a framework within which to understand the institution and to conduct peer comparisons
- Articulating and complying with ethics of data and research
- Evaluating and using standardized, commercially available surveys and instruments that might be used by an institution
- Developing measures for assessing student learning and program effectiveness
- Clarifying the organizational support from other offices needed for effective institutional research; e.g., support from and collaboration with information technology and registration
- Providing an overview of annual, periodic, and ad hoc studies germane to self-study and articulation; e.g., alumni surveys, surveys of currently enrolled students, faculty workload analyses, room utilization studies; and market analyses
- Leveraging limited resources; e.g., obtaining faculty help to implement IR and accreditation research projects, outsourcing, buying services, using graduate students, using interns
- Consulting and recommending appropriate research approaches to examine a particular topic
- Estimating and budgeting project costs; e.g., focus group projects, mail or phone surveys
- Preparing visual presentations of data, whether in chart or graphic format, to enhance the clarity and visual appeal so that readers focus on content

Institutional researchers should be able to pursue these activities at three levels of support. First, they will often have the technical ability to select and use the appropriate methodology and the needed computations. Second, they should be able to look at the activities within the appropriate context of higher education and the broader issues of societal learning. Finally, they should be able to frame the issues within the context of your institution and the specific strategic challenges it faces.

What Are Some of the Things IR Needs to Be Successful in Supporting Accreditation?

There are three basic types of access that the IR function needs in order to be successful in supporting accreditation: access to the decision making process, access to resources, and access to the data.

- ◇ **Access to decision making.** Accreditation involves the strategic management of colleges as well as the operational and tactical decisions that solve day-to-day problems. If IR is to be supportive on key issues and support the solution of complex problems, institutional researchers must have access to the decision making discussions as they progress and access to the decision makers as they work to solve the problems. The access to the decision processes gives time to focus and refine efforts to deal with emerging and new situations. It also provides the opportunity to bring data and IR professionals' skills to bear on focusing the discussions. Access enables institutional researchers to clarify needs and to use their resources to answer those needs.
- ◇ **Access to resources.** It is never a popular topic, but creating and sustaining a capable, viable IR function requires appropriate and adequate resources. One way to gain information on resources needed is to look at what a comparable IR office is using and what it is producing. A key resource is time, especially the lead time required to initiate new areas of activity.
- ◇ **Access to data.** While IR functions and activities have a great range of foci, the nearly universal common factor is a basis in empirical research. The data then become the basis of our ability to use methodologies in a timely and effective fashion. Among the data issues to consider are the accuracy of data, the utility (sometimes data need to be good enough, but don't need to be perfect, to meet the needs of a project), and data ownership (data are a university resource and are not the property of the person who collects them).

Resources

Presenters' packet of materials includes many resources that will be useful not only in the self-study and accreditation process, but also in ongoing work within an institution in areas such as assessing student learning outcomes, strategic planning, professional development of faculty and staff, creating and teaching courses in higher education, completing surveys and submitting data for IPEDS and other data collection activities, and more. Among materials included are:

- ○ Standardized and commercial instruments and tests: a beginning list
- ○ Sample budgets for research projects
- ○ Sample tasks/responsibilities under the institutional research area
- ○ Tips for managing an IR office
- ○ List of relevant conferences and meetings
- ○ National databases and sources of data
- ○ Key publications and URLs resources for institutional research

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Seeing the Complexities of Collaboration in a Collective Bargaining System

Jane Earley
Linda Baer
Larry Lundblad
Bette Midgarden
Josephine Reed-Taylor

What people see depends in part on what they expect to see. In most contemporary cultural institutions, there are often common patterns of organization and practice, and "outsiders" (those not members of a particular organization or set of organizations) expect to see that common pattern. If they do not, they may be puzzled and unable to understand how the organization can be successful in carrying out its work and mission.

Colleges and universities often have common patterns of organization, including terminology for patterns of governance and relationships. In the accreditation process for The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, Consultant-Evaluators read self-studies, visit campuses, draw conclusions, and make recommendations. But when they do not see expected structures and terminology, they may struggle to understand the culture and its effectiveness. The result may be a less effective review experience.

Institutions with collective bargaining present special problems of this sort. All collective bargaining contracts or agreements are different and incorporate matters particular to that institution. This becomes more complicated when a contract extends to multiple institutions, each of which incorporates historical practice into its adherence to the master contract. It's obvious this can cause even further confusion for Consultant-Evaluators.

In Minnesota, this situation is even more complex because the Minnesota State College and Universities (MnSCU) system structure includes state universities, community colleges, and technical colleges, each currently with a separate contract.

Against this background, institutions are attempting to collaborate on academic programs across institution type, often within the MnSCU system but sometimes with other regional institutions. While collaboration is hard under any circumstances, it becomes particularly difficult when the institutions have rigorous and disparate contracts governing faculty workload, program approval process, admission standards, and support mechanisms. These can contribute toward frustration and lack of success informing partnerships among or between the institutions. Often, visiting evaluators are baffled by the way institutions contrive such collaborations, and may be critical of what they see as unorthodox procedures.

Both institutions and evaluators have the responsibility for seeing more clearly. Institutions need to look closely at the unusual arrangements they have with collaborating partners because of their collective bargaining agreements. And visiting evaluators have an obligation to bring with them a better understanding of the difference a collective bargaining contract can make and the constraints that collective bargaining places on an institution.

Campus academic administrators on this panel represent a state university, a community college, and a technical college. They are also all Consultant-Evaluators for The Higher Learning Commission. They are joined on the panel by the vice chancellor for academic affairs of the MnSCU system, who has a system-wide perspective on these challenges. Each will describe briefly an example of collaboration on which he or she worked and highlight collective bargaining issues that might not be obvious to external reviewers.

Panelists will discuss some ways teams can better prepare to see how the institutions work, some ways campuses can focus the lens of visits and reports through which they are seen, and some challenges campuses have in trying to work collaboratively with other institutions in their system or region.

This working session will involve the audience in discussion. If time permits, members of the audience will be involved in reacting as external reviewers to mini-cases about collaboration in a multi-campus collective bargaining system. The goal is to help people begin to see more clearly how to look for the unique features of activity influenced by collective bargaining arrangements.

Jane Earley is Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs at Minnesota State University in Mankato.

Linda Baer is Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System in St. Paul.

Larry Lundblad is Vice President for Academic Affairs at South Central Technical College in North Mankato, Minnesota.

Bette Midgarden is Vice President for Academic Affairs at Minnesota State University in Moorhead.

Josephine Reed-Taylor is Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs at Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

Building Strength on Strength: Life After the Site Visit

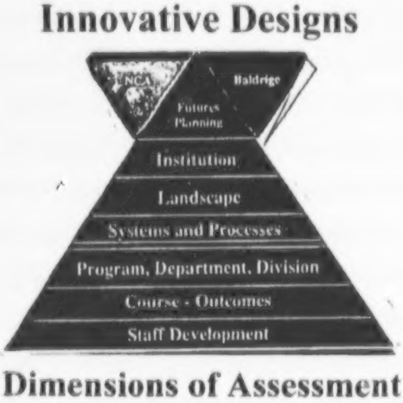
Judy A. Harris
Tammy Lee
Anne Niccolai

This marks the third year of NCA Annual Meeting presentations by Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC). At the 2000 Annual Meeting, Rochester Community and Technical College shared its alternative approach to reaccreditation, an approach centered around the Minnesota Council for Quality's Baldrige Educational Criteria. In 2001 evidence and experiences of Rochester Community and Technical College's continuing journey into the quality arena and our focus on using results to improve teaching and learning were presented. At the 2002 NCA Annual Meeting, the focus of our presentation is on life after the Higher Learning Commission site visit, including visit results, lessons learned, follow-up actions, and the impact of using a quality approach to our self-study.

Review of Past Presentations

Though AQIP had not been defined in early 1999, an alternative approach to a self-study focusing on quality tools and Baldrige criteria fit Rochester Community and Technical College's plans to create a culture of continuous improvement. NCA approved our request, and our 2000 presentation shared the plan for our approach to the alternative self-study that included (1) NCA reaccreditation, (2) strategic planning, and (3) continuous improvement using Baldrige criteria. The 2001 presentation focused on the six stages of strategic planning created and implemented by the college. Note the landscape analysis portion of the assessment plan:

- landscape analysis
- signature review
- formation of design criteria
- establishment of a desired culture
- identification of performance indicators
- strategy deployment



Site Visit

Six NCA Consultant-Evaluators, all with Baldrige experience, visited Rochester Community and Technical College in April 2001. The team's freeze-frame snapshot of our college during those three days combined with two previous Minnesota Quality Council site visits, offered us opportunities to celebrate our strengths and opportunities to address our weaknesses. In the months after the site visit, Rochester Community and Technical College has focused on (1) implementing our strategic plan; (2) defining general education for our institution; and (3) creating a college assessment plan.

After the Visit: Three Areas of Focus

1. Area 1: Implementation of Strategic Planning

Our preparation for the site visit included a strong focus on strategic planning. In early 1999, a group we called "The Futures Task Force" consisting of both external and internal stakeholders, began meeting to address landscape design, signature review, and related strategic planning issues. The external stakeholders completed their work before the site visit; however, internal members continued to implement strategic planning after the team visit.

a. **Strategic goal identification.** Taking strategic clusters identified by The Futures Task Force, faculty and staff completed identification of five strategic goals during the remainder of the spring semester of 2001. Rochester Community and Technical College's strategic goals are:

   - to create a learning organization
   - to position RCTC as the college of choice
   - to maximize student success and satisfaction
   - to utilize leading-edge technologies
   - to create strategic partnerships

b. **Aligning resources.** Using the five strategic goals as guidelines, faculty, staff, administrators, and students reviewed the budget to align fiscal resources to the goals. A line item was created in the budget, for instance, to support our need to address the assessment of student learning.

c. **Revision of college values.** During the summer of 2001, eleven faculty members and administrators attended the CQIN conference in Dallas. While we all agreed that our college value and belief statements reflected our core beliefs, we also agreed that we needed to condense these statements into shorter, easier to remember phrases. Based on our attempt to create an RCTC culture modeled loosely after the FISH concept, we identified the following as college values:

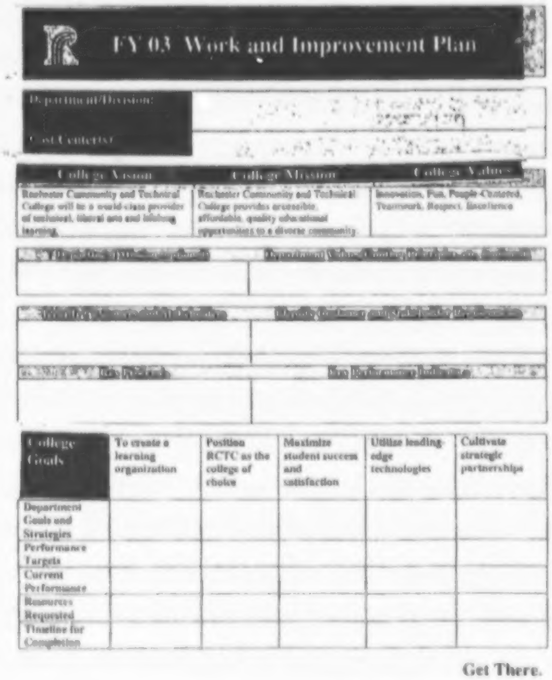
   - *Teamwork*
   - *Respect*
   - *Excellence*
   - *People-centered*
   - *Innovation*
   - *Fun*

d. **Revision of key performance indicators.** As part of our efforts at continuous improvement and because more of our stakeholders were beginning to understand concepts like "key performance indicators," a much broader audience was involved in identifying potential college KPIs. More than a hundred potential indicators were identified. In January 2002, a computer survey tool was used to narrow the potential key performance indicators into a measurable ten to fifteen.

e. **Work and improvement plan.** As part of our program review process completed in 2000, academic programs and disciplines completed a document identifying short- and long-range program plans. Fine-tuning the documents and implementing planning in functional as well as academic arenas is currently underway. A draft of the proposed template for planning is included.

2. Area 3: Assessment Plan

a. **Program review.** Before the late summer of 2000, the RCTC academic leadership team sought clearer indicators in evaluating the health of academic programs and disciplines. Five indicators of success, standards for each, measures, and results were identified. Each program and most academic disciplines were reviewed using these criteria. Results were shared throughout the college, responses and feedback solicited.



FY 03 Work and Improvement Plan

Department/Division:	
Cost Center(s):	

College Vision	College Mission	College Values
Rochester Community and Technical College will be a world-class provider of technical, liberal arts and lifelong learning.	Rochester Community and Technical College provides accessible, affordable, quality educational opportunities to a diverse community.	Innovation, Fun, People-Centered, Teamwork, Respect, Excellence

[illegible]	[illegible]

[illegible]	[illegible]

[illegible]	Key Performance Indicators

College Goals	To create a learning organization	Position RCTC as the college of choice	Maximize student success and satisfaction	Utilize leading-edge technologies	Cultivate strategic partnerships
Department Goals and Strategies					
Performance Targets					
Current Performance					
Resources Requested					
Timeline for Completion					

Get There.

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b. **Assessment plan.** While our program review process was strong and had followed the plan, do, check, act model, and our institutional assessment plan was in place as the pyramid graphic above demonstrates, an institutional plan and process to measure student learning on a departmental, program, course, and individual level was missing. What follows is a summary of the steps taken to address the creation of a culture of assessment at Rochester Community and Technical College.

PROCESS:

Two faculty members, who had been part of the NCA planning team that we called "Innovative Designs" and who were also actively involved in assessment of student learning, presented a plan to the academic leadership team after the site visit. The draft included release time for two faculty coordinators on an ongoing basis. In addition, a line item or cost center was added to the budget to include dollars for bringing in national speakers on assessment, for faculty stipends, for faculty travel to national conferences on assessment, and for materials and supplies. Once it was approved by the academic leadership team, faculty union leaders were presented with the plan and encouraged to appoint faculty to a college assessment committee. Currently, five faculty members and the vice president of academic affairs comprise the assessment committee. Collaboration with the two faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) coordinators as well as joint activities between CTL and assessment has begun.

During the summer of 2001, an application to participate in the fall AAHE workshop on assessment was submitted, and RCTC was accepted as a participant. The workshop assists colleges in preparing an assessment plan by offering presentations and team planning time with a mentor to create a college assessment plan. During the fall semester of 2001, the assessment committee has completed our college assessment plan and has begun its implementation.

Finally, an occupational program and a liberal arts offering will pilot a system-wide electronic assessment tool during spring of 2002. Two faculty development opportunities, one in January and one in March, promise to bring us closer to our goal of creating an institutional culture of collective and shared values that support the measurement of student learning. A copy of the assessment plan will be shared at the Annual Meeting presentation.

3. Area 3: General Education

An issue that has haunted Rochester Community and Technical College since the merger of the technical and community colleges in 1996 has been the lack of a clear understanding by all faculty of general education and its relationship to the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum. In need of immediate resolution, academic affairs set completing a college definition of general education and a review of courses identified as general education as a goal for fall 2001. Action taken to remedy this issue is described in a process list below:

PROCESS:

a. Identification of general education as an academic priority for fall 2001.

b. Creation of a faculty general education task force. Identification of faculty chair.

c. Presentation by state system representatives on the relationship of general education and the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

d. Broad-based involvement in discussion of general education.

e. E-mail survey of faculty and staff.

f. Presentation of committee recommendation to Curriculum Council in winter 2002.

Advantages to an Alternative Approach?

No surprises here for Rochester Community and Technical College—rather, the entire process reinforced what we knew. The advantages of using a quality-based Baldrige approach to our self-study include:

1. Availability of outside resources such as the Minnesota Quality Council to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.

2. Identification and charting of systems and processes to foster continuous improvement.
3. Motivation and incentive for continuous improvement by measuring outcomes and focusing on successes.

Rochester Community and Technical College believes that the Baldrige approach reinforced by The Higher Learning Commission through AQIP provides us with the guidance, tools, and incentive to make our vision a reality: "Rochester Community and Technical College will be a world-class provider of technical, liberal arts, and lifelong learning." This year, three education institutions have been awarded the National Malcolm Baldrige Award for the very first time. It is our intent to become a part of AQIP and to someday add RCTC to the list of Baldrige winners. We are pleased to have you share in the past three years of our journey to reach our goal.

Judy A. Harris is Vice President of Academic Affairs at Rochester Community and Technical College in Minnesota.

Tammy Lee is Business Faculty Member and Assessment Co-coordinator at Rochester Community and Technical College in Minnesota.

Anne Niccolai is Dental Hygiene Faculty Member and Assessment Co-coordinator at Rochester Community and Technical College in Minnesota.

Accreditation Connections

Kay L. Hegler
Deryl Merritt

The purpose of this paper is to identify common elements in assessment expectations stated by regional accreditation bodies and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The review of these common elements may clarify the reasons to seek regional and professional accreditation, identify assessment strategies to enhance existing assessment programs, identify components of the assessment cycle that meet both regional and professional accreditation standards, and facilitate self-assessment of an assessment program. These actions should ensure that faculty recognize that an assessment program can and should be designed to meet the criteria established by both regional commissions and professional specialized councils.

Assessment as a means to improve learning has been an explicit part of professional literature for several years. It first appeared in the written expectations of the North Central Commission for Institutions of Higher Education *Handbook* in 1989 (Lopez 2000). This regional accreditation body's assessment expectations are similar to those of the other five regional commissions (Angelo 1996). Some faculty and administrators believed that assessment was one of those educational fads that would pass through a phase of emphasis and then disappear. Federal expectations for Title II reporting, a shift from input measures like course completion and number of credits hours distributed across a transcript to performance outcomes, provide evidence that assessment is not a trendy fad but rather a significant component of our educational activities.

Ewell (1996) provides a list of twelve attributes of good teaching. Among these, he recognizes assessment of student achievement and feedback about their performance. Early and regular information about the student's learning enable the student to improve. Individual student assessments completed during courses may be aggregated for analysis to design program improvements.

Angelo (1996) acknowledges that assessment has resulted in improvement in student learning at a limited number of institutions, and asserts that standards to provide an explicit statement of expected learning are a necessary first component to effective assessment. Another is increased political will to implement the standards.

NCATE commissioned Richard Stiggins to prepare a planning paper specifying the attributes of a performance-based assessment system for teacher preparation. This paper will serve as a guiding document to teacher education units preparing for accreditation reviews using the NCATE 2000 standards. Stiggins describes four attributes of an effective assessment system:

- Sound assessment systems are specifically designed to serve carefully articulated purposes.
- Quality assessment systems provide evidence of student mastery of clearly articulated and appropriate achievement expectations.
- Quality assessment systems rely on assessment methods capable of accurately reflecting the intended achievement target(s) and serve the intended purpose(s).
- Effective assessment systems provide for the efficient and effective storage, retrieval, and communication of information. (2000, 4,5,6)

The Higher Learning Commission has enhanced the expectations for institutional and programmatic assessment. This regional accreditation body recently released Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Levels of Implementation (2000), a matrix that describes institutional performance in assessment goals and sets guidelines for institutions as they evaluate and strengthen their assessment programs.

Similarly, the NCATE standards for performance assessment include six distinct standards (NCATE 2001). Each standard is followed by a rubric with several elements and three levels of performance for each, and a narrative supporting explanation. The elements of Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation are assessment system;

data collection, analysis, and evaluation; and use of data for program improvement. With these six standards and the explicit focus of one standard on assessment, NCATE makes public its commitment to unit accountability and improvement for candidate and student learning.

The Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) standards for accreditation focus on three key dimensions: approach, deployment, and results (1998). "Approach" deals with the methods that are used to address each standard; "deployment" is the extent to which the methods are applied to all requirements of the standard; and "results" refers to the outcomes associated with achieving each standard. ACBSP specifically links approach and deployment for assessment purposes to "emphasize that descriptions of Approach should always indicate Deployment consistent with the specific requirements of the standard" (p. 4).

The Higher Learning Commission, a regional accreditation body; NCATE, the professional accreditation council for educators; and ACBSP, the professional accrediting body for business schools and programs, have similar expectations for member accreditation. Faculty and administrators preparing for accreditation reviews may not be aware of the connections among the various expectations. This presentation will identify several ways one set of assessment activities meet the expectations of both regional accreditation and NCATE.

Because both regional accreditation commissions and professional accreditation councils expect assessment to result in increased accountability and improved student learning, faculty and administrators may view all assessment work as meeting the needs of all associations. The assessment work for regional bodies is not separate and distinct from the work for professional councils. By recognizing the connections of this work, faculty and administrators can avoid duplication and ensure that all assessment work is shared with accreditation site visitors to any campus.

The Higher Learning Commission and NCATE have each completed extensive work resulting in matrices for levels of achievement in assessment programs. The Higher Learning Commission released its Chapter Reference as an addendum to the *Handbook for Accreditation* in March 2000. NCATE published its newly ratified standards in May 2000. ACBSP revised its compliance manual in June 1999 by adding narrative sections that describe ways to assess strategies that business programs and schools use to address the standards. These documents enable administrators and faculty to self-assess their assessment program and transform language in the rubrics and narrative to recommendations for their own assessment program enhancement.

Common elements include (1) explicit statement of student outcomes for both general education and degree programs; (2) regular and systematic or annual program review; (3) analysis beyond description in reporting the data; (4) public accountability through shared reports; (5) expectations of multiple measures from direct and indirect, and internal and external, measures; (6) evidence of program improvement directly linked to areas of need identified by assessment data in previous report cycles; (7) faculty involvement in setting learner expectations, selecting measures, data analysis, and improvement design; (8) leadership in assessment at both institutional and programmatic level; and (9) student learning outcomes on course syllabi or other appropriate publications. The four attributes of effective assessment systems noted by Stiggins (2000) are embedded within these elements.

In the following section, each of these nine elements will be discussed individually. First, language from The Higher Learning Commission, NCATE, and ACBSP standards is presented to confirm the strong relationship among the Commission and professional association standards. The selected quotations from the NCA, NCATE, or ACBSP documents represent the fullness of the documents. This paper includes enough statements to assure the reader that common elements exist, but it is not an exhaustive list. For greater relevance to this audience, all references to a regional accreditation body are selected from The Higher Learning Commission, although it would be possible to identify support from other regional commissions.

1. **Explicit statement of student outcomes for both general education and degree programs**

    - The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, II. a. Level Two: "Faculty in many or most departments have developed measurable objectives for each of the program's educational goals" (p. 9).

    - The Higher Learning Commission *Handbook of Accreditation*, Second Edition, Criterion One: "long- and short-range institutional and educational goals" (p. 64).

    - NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "The unit has developed an assessment system with its professional community that reflects the conceptual framework(s) and professional and state standards" (p. 21).

    - ACBSP (1998) Standard 4: Information and Analysis: "Each business school or program is responsible for developing its own outcomes assessment program" (p. 14).

2. **Regular and systematic or annual program review**

   ○ The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, III. a. Level Two: "There is an organizational chart and an annual calendar of the implementation of the Assessment Program" (p. 11).

   ○ The Higher Learning Commission *Handbook of Accreditation*, Second Edition, Criterion Four: "c. structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty, and administration. d. plans as well as ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institutional continuance" (p. 66).

   ○ NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "The unit maintains an assessment system that provides regular and comprehensive information on applicant qualifications, candidate proficiencies, competence of graduates, unit operations, and program quality" (p. 22).

   ○ ACBSP (1998) Standard 4: Information and Analysis. (Although this is not required by ACBSP, it does require regular examples of documented changes.) Compliance with Standard 4 does not require annual reporting, however "examples of documented changes that have been made because of outcomes assessment efforts" (1999, 2) must be available.

3. **Analysis beyond description in reporting the data**

   ○ The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, IV. Level Two Efficacy: "Faculty members are increasingly engaged in interpreting assessment results, discussing their implications, and recommending changes in academic programs and other areas in order to improve student learning" (p. 13).

   ○ NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "These data are regularly and systematically compiled, summarized, and analyzed to improve candidate performance, program quality, and unit operations" (p. 22).

   ○ ACBSP (1998) Standard 4: Information and Analysis: "Business schools and programs must have an outcomes assessment program with documentation of the results and evidence that the results are being used for the development and/or improvement of the institution's academic programs" (p. 14).

4. **Public accountability through shared reports**

   ○ The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, IV. Level Three" "The institution publicly and regularly celebrates demonstrated student learning, performance, and achievement" (p.13).

   ○ NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "Candidate and faculty assessment data are regularly shared with candidates and faculty respectively to help them reflect on their performance and improve it" (p. 22).

   ○ ACBSP (1998) Standard 3.3: Student and Stakeholders Satisfaction Results: "Summarize the business school's or program's student and stakeholder satisfaction and dissatisfaction results" (p.12). These results are then made available to the accreditation visitation team or other interested individuals as required.

5. **Expectations of multiple measures from direct and indirect, and internal and external, measures**

   ○ The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, II. a. Level Two: "Faculty members are taking responsibility for ensuring that direct and indirect measures of student learning are aligned with the program's educational goals and measurable objectives" (p. 9).

   ○ NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "Using multiple assessments from internal and external sources, the unit collects data from applicants, candidates, recent graduates, faculty, and other members of the professional community" (p. 22).

- ACBSP (1998) Standard 3.1a: Student Knowledge: "A variety of information should be used in assessing the effectiveness of the courses and program options in light of the educational objectives and observed professional performance of graduates" (p. 10).

6. **Evidence of program improvement directly linked to areas of need identified by assessment data in previous report cycles**
   - The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, IV. Level Two: "Academic unit heads are documenting the changes made in pedagogy, curriculum, course content, and/or academic resources and support services to improve student learning as a result of the faculty's responses and recommendations to assessment" (p. 13).
   - NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "The unit analyzes program evaluation and performance assessment data to initiate changes where indicated" (p. 22).
   - ACBSP (1998) Standard 6.1b: Education Delivery: "Describe how the results of program evaluation have been used to improve the program" (p. 44).

7. **Faculty involvement in setting learner expectations, selecting measures, data analysis, and improvement design**
   - The Higher Learning Commission *Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation* Criterion 3 b: "assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting...control by the institution's faculty of evaluation of student learning and granting of academic credit."
   - NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Acceptable Level: "Unit faculty collaborate with members of the professional community to design and implement the system" (p. 23).
   - ACBSP (1998) Standard 6.1b: Education Delivery: "Are the faculty involved in the periodic review of the business programs and curriculum?" (p. 44).

8. **Leadership in assessment at both institutional and programmatic level**
   - The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, III. a. Level Two: "Unit heads endorse the use of departmental funds for professional development in assessment, for faculty release time, and other expenses associated with the department's assessment activities and initiatives based on assessment findings intended to improve student learning" (p. 11).
   - NCATE (2001) Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, Target Level: "The unit, with the involvement of its professional community, is implementing an assessment system that reflects the conceptual framework(s) and incorporates candidate proficiencies outlined in professional and state standards" (p. 21).
   - ACBSP (1998) Standard 1: Leadership: "Administrators (chief academic officers, deans, department chairs) and faculty must personally lead and be involved in creating and sustaining values, business school or program direction, performance expectations, student focus, and a leadership system that promotes performance excellence" (p. 7).

9. **Student learning outcomes on course syllabi or other appropriate publications**
   - The Higher Learning Commission, *Addendum to the Handbook on Accreditation*, Levels of Implementation–Patterns of Characteristics, III. a. Level Three: "Syllabi for courses being currently offered and all submitted courses and programs state measurable objectives for student learning and provide for the assessment of students' academic achievement" (p. 11).
   - NCATE (2001) Conceptual Frameworks: "The conceptual framework(s) provides the following structural elements...performance expectations for candidates, aligning the expectations with professional, state, and institutional standards" (p. 12).
   - ACBSP (1998) Standard 4.1: Selection and Use of Information and Data:. The explanation of the criterion for standard 4.1 states that goals or learning objectives for graduates from the business unit are required to evaluate compliance with the standard (1999, 12).

Strategies for Assessment Programs Meeting the Common Elements

There are several workable strategies for assessment programs meeting the common elements of criteria for both our specialized accreditation bodies–ACBSP and NCATE–and our regional accreditation commission, The Higher Learning Commission.

1. Faculty should recognize assessment as an integral part of the instructional process. Assessment is not an additional separate expectation for faculty and institutions; it is part of the teaching and learning cycle.
2. Department chairs, deans, and provosts should lead faculty in the use of assessment data to improve programs, document student/candidate learning for both regional and professional accreditation agencies, and celebrate the confirmed increases in learner achievement.
3. All faculty and administrators should recognize the connections between assessment expectations of regional and professional accreditation agencies. The assessment program for general education outcomes and outcomes for academic programs should follow the same procedures and have similar components. These components can allow adaptable application to more than one professional specialized accreditation body while their campus pattern builds confidence and expertise in application.
4. All reports prepared in the annual assessment cycle should be included in the evidence room for external visitors during the on-site peer review process. Summaries should be available so visitation team members experience the breadth of documentation that is available. These summaries should be supported by individual reports revealing the depth of assessment activity to report and improve student achievement. Self-study reports for a regional accreditation commission document candidate competence in the academic content area(s) and the liberal arts. The ACBSP and NCATE performance-based assessment systems effectively complete program review expectations of the regional commission.
5. Data should be shared with significant stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty, administrators, and board members. Broad distribution of executive summaries of the assessment program, data, analysis, and interventions to enhance achievement increases the momentum to continue.

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Coordination and Collaboration Among Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies: The View from Health Professions

Sarah S. Baker
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Background

Changes in higher education, health care, and the accreditation process have been occurring at increasing rates over the past decade. Thompson (1993) noted that accrediting agencies were designed to serve institutions of higher education and ensure that standards of educational quality were met through voluntary self-regulation. However, this long-honored staple of American higher education continues to come under attack. A good deal of concern has arisen over the cost and self-serving nature of various policies and practices and the inflexibility of the accreditation process. While all accreditation has been attacked, specialized accreditation has come under greater scrutiny and has been receiving added criticism.

Within the health professions, many specialized accrediting bodies were a result of diversification from what started as a regulation of medical education nearly one hundred years ago. While numerous specialized accrediting agencies, especially those in health care, profess to play a major role in safeguarding public health and safety, critics document examples of the effects of turf-protection, status, and income. What has developed from the growth of some specialized accrediting agencies is a demand to more actively participate in evaluation of the colleges and universities in which they are housed. This, in addition to added focus on additional resources that have little if any connection to student learning, has added to the rising cost of accreditation.

A variety of reports have identified the need to improve the accreditation process. The National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education (1998) report entitled "Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices" warned against the cost of higher education. Besides recommending improved accountability to the public, the commission called for the need to "rethink accreditation." More specifically, the commission recommended the development of a well-coordinated, efficient process relating institutional productivity to effectiveness in improving student learning. Within this report, specialized accreditation came under greater assault due to its continued focus on resource measures in making quality judgments. Among the various commission recommendations was the development of coordinated activities between regional and specialized accreditors that could affect productivity, efficiency, and cost. In support of this coordination between regional and specialized agencies, the commission urged Congress to consider changes in the secretary of education's criteria for institutional recognition to encourage voluntary coordination.

Many of these concerns were previously recognized in health professions literature. Gelmon (1997) has identified the rigid application of accreditation standards, cost, and lack of collaboration and support for encouraging innovation. Pressures on accrediting bodies to reduce duplication and to increase coordination and cooperation between and among themselves have been clearly articulated as ways to improve the accreditation process (Simmons 1994).

The Task Force on Accreditation of Health Professions Education report entitled "Strategies for Change and Improvement" articulated many of the previous concerns (Gelmon et al. 1999). This report notes duplication and wasted effort because of overlap between regional and specialized accreditation and stresses the need for change in the accreditation process of health professions.

Currently there are overlap and duplication in various facets of the regional and specialized accreditation processes. Numerous requests for the same data in different formats come from the accrediting agencies. It has been suggested that development of coordinated activities among regional and specialized accreditors could positively affect cost, efficiency, and productivity. The possibility exists for more efficient accrediting systems that minimize waste and duplication. While there is a great deal of concern associated with specialized accreditation, little input has been gathered from those integral and internal to health professions educational programs that accreditation standards impact. Thus, the purpose of this study was to compare the perspectives of selected health professions deans and program directors related to specialized accreditation effectiveness and reform.

Methodology

Survey research was used to study perspectives of health professions deans and program directors located in four-year colleges/universities and academic health centers/medical schools. Surveys were mailed to program directors offering clinical laboratory sciences/medical technology, nuclear medicine technology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, radiography, and radiation therapy. Simultaneously, health professions deans located within these institutions were surveyed.

Participants were asked to assess specialized accreditation in four categories: purpose, process, effectiveness, and critique and reform. Following demographic/descriptive information requested, participants were asked to select responses to statements on a Likert scale with six options, including a "don't know" category. Open-ended questions were included at the conclusion of the survey form.

Data Collection and Analysis

Seven hundred and seventy-three surveys were mailed, and 424 valid responses were received (91 from deans and 333 from program directors), yielding a response rate of 54.85 percent. Specifically, there was a 51.12 percent (91/178) response rate from deans and 55.97 percent (333/595) from program directors.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 10.0.7. Number of responses, valid percentages, measures of central tendency and dispersion (mean and standard deviation) followed. GLM Multivariate Analysis was used to analyze the four categories (purpose, process, effectiveness, and critique and reform) of dependent variables against the independent variable of position (dean or program director). GLM Multivariate Analysis demonstrated significance; thus follow-up univariate analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were performed.

Summary of Findings

It is clear from this study that health professions deans and program directors agree with the purposes of specialized accreditation. Not only do they believe that accreditation provides an effective national system for assuring quality in higher education; they also believe that specialized accreditation provides an important process for improving the quality of health programs. Both support peer evaluation as a major strength of specialized accreditation, especially as opposed to governmental review. The area of greatest agreement for deans and program directors was that health programs benefit from periodic self-evaluation required by the specialized accreditation self-study.

There was less agreement from health professions deans and program directors about the specialized accreditation process. ANOVA identified the process category as being significantly influenced by the position of dean or program director. Differences in perspectives between deans and program directors were especially evident with items related to purpose of the site visit and selection of site visit teams. Deans and program directors were close to agreement that evaluation of a program's self-study against standards/essentials by a site visit team of peer evaluators is an effective feature of accreditation. However, when the self-study was examined more closely, there was lack of agreement that it is an effective feature of accreditation.

Neither deans nor program directors wanted state intervention for accountability or improvement goals. Program directors (more than deans) perceived current practices of specialized accreditation as effective in evaluating program effectiveness and stimulating quality improvements. Both perceived program evaluations by professional peers as more effective than evaluations by government officials or agencies. Written comments identify peer review not only as a strength but also an area needing improvement. While program directors were more supportive of specialized accreditation costs as being justified by results, the response was close to neutral. The perceived lack of support for accreditation costs from deans corresponds with their written comments and concerns related to specialized accreditation costs from the deans.

ANOVA indicated that the critique and reform category was influenced by position. In all previous categories, program directors' means were higher than those of the deans. For the critique and reform category, a reversal was evident, with the sum mean for deans higher than that for program directors. It was clearly evident that deans were in greater support of reform. Deans wanted coordination among health professions specialized accreditation agencies. There was less agreement that there should be coordination among regional and specialized accreditation agencies. While not in total agreement, deans perceived that coordination between health professions specialized accreditation agencies and coordination between regional and specialized accreditation agencies would decrease costs and reduce duplication of efforts. With greater agreement, deans believed that information such as administrative structure, faculty, student government, budgetary processes, library and learning resources accessibility and services, student health services, and guidance and counseling could serve as a common core of information to share between programs and accrediting agencies. There was less support for development of a common health professions self-study format with a specific addendum for each program. Deans and program directors supported the continued role of assessment as a component of specialized accreditation. However, there was less support for focusing specialized accreditation on student learning outcomes. While the role of peer reviewers was seen not only as a strength but also as an area needing improvement, neither deans nor program directors believed that using professional evaluation teams would enhance the effectiveness of specialized accreditation.

Conclusions

There are differences in perspectives between health professions deans and program directors related to specialized accreditation effectiveness and reform. While both agree with purposes of specialized accreditation, they are less supportive of specialized accreditation's process, effectiveness, and critique and reform. The position of dean or program director significantly influenced the process and critique and reform categories.

Perspectives of health professions deans related to specialized accreditation effectiveness and reform are similar to those previously articulated by external groups. Deans are in less agreement with specialized accreditation effectiveness but in greater support of the idea that specialized accreditation needs reform. They are more concerned with costs, duplication of efforts, and coordination. Deans agree with development of a common core of information that could be shared between programs and accrediting agencies.

While health professions program directors are closer to agreement than deans in the effectiveness category, they are closer to neutral in the critique and reform category. Program directors are less concerned with costs, duplication of efforts, and coordination. There is a significant difference in the perspectives of health professions deans and program directors regarding the specialized accreditation process and critique and reform. Themes of peer review, quality control, self-study, standards, process, site visit, and costs emerge from deans and program directors when provided the opportunity to articulate written comments.

Recommendations

It is evident that improvements to the accreditation process are warranted. Brown (1999) believes that for regional accreditation to survive in this century, and perhaps even to prosper, some initiatives would appear to be wise and prudent. Likewise, as demonstrated by this study, it might be said that for health professions specialized accreditation to survive, some initiatives would appear to be wise and prudent. Knowledge and communication are at the forefront of reform initiatives.

Reform, especially coordination among health profession accreditation agencies and among regional and specialized accreditation agencies, should be closely evaluated, and where appropriate, changes should be made.

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Meeting the Challenge: One College's Approach to Initial Candidacy

Elizabeth R. Berrey

There were multiple demands on our new single-purpose college that required establishing and meeting an aggressive timetable to achieve initial candidacy:

- We needed to be eligible to disburse Title IV funds for our students.
- We wanted students to be able to have been graduated from an accredited institution (and this was an early requisite step on that path).
- We needed to revamp the comprehensive evaluation plan that had been established when the college was seeking its initial approvals because that plan no longer fit conceptually.
- Finally, we had two accrediting bodies whose standards we wanted to meet very thoroughly and as expeditiously as possible.

There are so many competing demands for a new institution that a thorough self-study, even during the first year of operations, was obviously going to help us clarify priorities. Time was of the essence.

The challenge was to find a process that was right for our institution. Reviewing official documents from the Commission and notes from presentations at the Annual Meeting, the following guidelines–nay, directives(!) –to assure a successful self-study surfaced repeatedly.

- It is critical that *planning for the self-study be an explicit process* and not be short-changed in time or effort.
- Take two years to do a self-study.
- Begin by *establishing* a *steering committee* with *cross-institutional representation.*
- Select people for the steering committee who are willing to reflect honestly on the institution, and make sure they are can-do people.
- Give those people chairing major sections of the self-study release time.

We are so small (and were even smaller then) that none of this was feasible for us. As the about-to-become resident expert, I took a deep breath, got the lay of the land, and quickly determined how the self-study process would be conducted. This paper describes one model used for a *very small institution.*

From the Beginning: Self-Study

As the person charged with shepherding the accreditation efforts, I determined at the outset that we would be involved in self-study from the *beginning of the eligibility process.* While attending the Annual Meeting in March 1999, I realized that although I had participated in accreditation reviews and had developed and implemented CQI/TQM programs in the past, the language and culture of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (now The Higher Learning Commission, a commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools) was new and somewhat different. I listened carefully, trying to translate, and made certain that I attended every meeting addressing self-study, took explicit notes, read the pertinent articles in *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement* thoroughly, and took the Commission staff up on an offer to meet with the institution while at the Annual Meeting. My president/dean and I met with an assistant director to discuss our college and get clarification and guidance about this process that was entirely new to us. Upon our return to campus, we immediately initiated step one of the eligibility process, and within four months we submitted our Preliminary Information Form (PIF). Addressing each item in the PIF was the beginning of our self-study.

During that four-month period, we completed step two of the eligibility process, and our staff liaison was assigned. A word about the staff liaison: This person is liaison to many institutions. However, this did not stop me from contacting her when I needed clarification about something. I did find out which way she preferred to be contacted (phone versus e-mail) and always, always introduced myself along with the name and location of my institution. I never acted as if I expected her to pull my institution up in her memory by just hearing my name. I also reminded her about the part of the process on which we were working. In my experience, that kind of consideration goes a long way in helping to establish a constructive working relationship. Our liaison asked to visit with us, and of course we eagerly accepted. This does not always happen, but if it does, you should jump at the chance. It helps to make real for the liaison the nature of the institution, which fosters better consultation and assists in identifying a good match in Consultant-Evaluators.

In preparation for submitting our PIF, I became intimately familiar with the expectations of the Commission related to accreditation—the resident expert, as it were. I read, reread, highlighted, and flagged everything having to do with the PIF in the *Handbook on Accreditation*. I also secured copies of two other self-studies from smaller institutions (although not nearly as small as ours) and constantly used them as reference guides for how to document meeting the GIRs. As one example, at the outset it was unclear as to how one documents the evidence of meeting GIRs dealing with mission and authorization. How does one write *evaluative* rather than *descriptive* statements about these GIRs? Examples of the ways in which other institutions had successfully presented evidence to support their mission and accreditation were very helpful in learning how to phrase appropriate responses.

As I read and reread, I also noted who at our college would be the knowledgeable person in each particular area, and in which official documents specific information would be found. I then worked one-on-one with each person to guide his or her learning about the accreditation process and what was required by the GIRs. Of course, as we studied the GIRs, it became apparent that some things needed prompt attention, and planned action was then taken. We found that as we worked on completing the PIF, the institution progressed and became stronger. We found the GIRs to be a welcome standard and guide for our growth and progress.

Who Does What

So much official emphasis is placed upon the process, the breadth of participation required, and the recommended committee structures for self-study. We knew that we could not follow the models that were being recommended. We were just too small and too new. At the outset of the self-study process, we had a total student body of sixteen and a staff of five, including the president/dean and her administrative assistant. By the time the PIF was submitted, we had a staff of eight (three additional faculty) and thirty-four students. What we were able to do, however, and were fully committed to, was to implement a self-study that was rigorous, honest, and thorough.

During the first year of operations, we initially met as a committee-of-the-whole to do the college's work. We then progressed to sit as separate committees (such as admissions, curriculum, etc.), with most of us serving on every committee. Because we were so small and everyone was filling multiple roles, I utilized the existing meeting structure as the place to both educate about the GIRs and to gather assessments about the quality of what we were doing and whether we met the requirements, and to prioritize what was absolutely necessary to accomplish in our early days of development. Each person drafted responses to sections of the PIF for which they had organizational responsibility. I drafted the remaining sections based on what I had learned from the others as well as my own observations and study, and pulled all the contributions into a document that read as a whole. The draft was circulated for everyone's comments, corrections, and education. The final copy was in the mail shortly thereafter.

Thus all five staff began by looking at our college in the bold light of the GIRs and embarked upon what everyone had come to appreciate as a commitment to perpetual self-study. We conducted an honest and thorough assessment based upon the requirements stated in the GIRs, took guidance and direction for immediate structural modifications and specific actions from those requirements, and projected future action based on what we learned during that phase of self-study. We did not form any new committees—that means no steering committee—and no one got release time! While not shortchanging student education or services, faculty development, or committee work, as examples, time and concentration had to be simultaneously focused and dedicated—sometimes even days at a time—to carrying out the self-study. We needed to see ourselves not just as academicians but also as entrepreneurs, committing the requisite time, intense effort, and can-do/will-do attitude that it takes to get any new enterprise up and running with good quality. During this whole time, we were educating students, providing student services, developing our relationship with our collaborating institution that provides the general education courses, evaluating and organizing all college course requirements into knowledge clusters, further developing the nursing curriculum, managing the budget and building upgrades, engaging in public relations and fund development, and participating in board development and strategic planning. Oh yes! And then there was recruitment, admissions, dorm life... Oh! And faculty recruitment, development, mentoring....

Relaxing After Submitting the PIF

Actually, there was no time for letdown. We had now integrated self-study into the daily routine of the college and demonstrated that processes to analyze and evaluate were both continuous and sustainable after submitting the PIF. So immediately upon submitting the PIF, I began to orient our newly hired faculty to the accreditation process, giving each of them a copy of the PIF. I worked with faculty about assessment of student learning, utilizing the *Addendum on Assessment* to guide our discussions about where they perceived we were in assessing student learning and in developing our culture of assessment. After my own thorough study of the five criteria, I identified and assigned areas for evaluation by appropriate persons and served as their resource and guide in evaluating our strengths and challenges in each of the five criteria. There were sections of the report that were written by the president/dean, the director of student services and financial aid, or the registrar/director of admissions. But I wrote 90 percent of the report in order to relieve others to continue their daily responsibilities for the operation of the college. Drafts were distributed and requests for corrections, clarifications, etc., were strongly invited. Everyone took the entire process extremely seriously and responded with corrections and suggestions. The hardest struggle for some was to refrain from trying to institute quick fixes as we identified our challenges. The inclination to "not air dirty linens" is powerful! But had we been diverted into meeting the challenges immediately rather than identifying a timetable to address them, we would have never been able to complete our self-study in the aggressive time frame that we had set for ourselves.

After the Commission's team had reviewed our PIF and recommended that we proceed with our self-study, we scheduled a date for the site visit and backdated every timeline from there. We were ahead of the game because we had not seen the submission of the PIF as a time for respite but had maintained full steam, continuing our self-study. During the autumn, the self-study continued along with the writing of the report. Enough time was allotted for having an outside reader, who was encouraged to be ruthless in his comments and editing, to read the almost-final draft. After his suggestions were incorporated, the final copy was sent to the printer, bound, and sent out as directed.

Students

Of course, the students were kept informed along the way. And that was as much a challenge as anything. First-year students are having enough challenges in their initial year of college. They want their college to be accredited, but they are disinclined to participate actively in the process. Additionally, there are disappointments in coming to college: a course is much harder than anticipated, courses are much harder than anticipated, and so forth—litanies that are familiar to educators everywhere. So there are many things keeping first-year college students from being able to actively engage in this process.

We set two goals for our initial road to candidacy: to keep our students well informed about progress and to prepare them to meet with the visiting team. In order to do this, we instituted a system of communication that began with an information flyer and included repeated educating about accreditation at orientations, in meetings with the president/dean, in the student newsletter, and in periodic update flyers. Academic advisors also used a portion of their meeting times with their advisees to educate about accreditation. One-on-one, students had many questions. For those with worries, our students were honest in their criticisms *and* their praise.

A Word About Our Board of Trustees

Our board of trustees, along with the rest of us, was on a steep learning curve. The board members met the challenge well. Our president/dean educated them about the college's accreditation and self-study processes. They fully supported those efforts by board resolution, allocating necessary fiscal resources, supporting an organizational structure in which a senior administrator is dedicated to the college's self-study and working towards accreditation, taking seriously results of the self-study, and making necessary changes in their own governance structure.

As a consequence, they were very knowledgeable in their participation during our site visit, and their commitment, knowledge, and support were noted as strengths for our institution.

Summary

For MedCentral College of Nursing, the process leading to being granted candidacy status resulted in a successful site visit. We had team members who implemented their dual roles of consultants and evaluators well. We learned from them; they were entirely respectful; and we have made progress since their visit based on their wise recommendations.

We view our seeking accreditation as an ongoing institutional journey, as contrasted to a final destination. This is a road with no end.

Elizabeth R. Berrey is Associate Dean and Professor of Nursing at MedCentral College of Nursing in Mansfield, Ohio.

Initial Candidacy: Planning, Preparation, Participation, Improvement, and Tenacity

Gil Linne
Laurie McCown

Enormous challenge is placed on an institution seeking initial candidacy with The Higher Learning Commission to demonstrate that it meets the standards incorporated in the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) and addresses the Criteria for Accreditation. The challenge is even greater for an institution with a new educational paradigm of higher learning.

The self-study process should demonstrate that a continuous improvement model is incorporated in all operations. All actions should focus on the students and their educational success. Colleges and universities should not only demonstrate that their models function to continuously upgrade the quality of the learning experience provided to students, but they should also use the same models to develop their self-studies. Therefore, the self-study is a vehicle to show that an institution has a powerful institutional effectiveness and assessment approach and will remain institutionally dynamic while continuing to increase quality.

Each university has a different structure and must understand the need to design a process that is right for its own organization. There is no correct way to accomplish this task. This paper conveys our conclusions, as well as the insights gained, from successfully completing the initial candidacy step.

About Northcentral University

Started in 1996, Northcentral University (NCU) is a private for-profit distance learning institution offering programs from the bachelor's through doctorate degree levels in business and technology management and in psychology. Distance learning involves education where the learner (student) and the faculty mentor (teacher) are not located in the same place.

The educational emphasis developed by Northcentral University to accomplish its mission has three key components: (1) distance learning, (2) active self-learning, and (3) one-on-one mentoring. Active self-learning recognizes that education is an individual process in which individuals with different learning needs and styles can be accommodated. Learners are provided with a variety of materials for each course, including a course outline and detailed syllabus, a list of textbooks and reference materials for the course, and information on how to access the faculty mentor assigned for the course. The faculty member provides guidance, answers questions, and evaluates the individual learner's work. Contact between the learner and the faculty mentor is achieved via telephone, voice mail, fax, e-mail, videoconferencing, and, on occasion, person-to-person contact.

The Road to Initial Candidacy

The constituents of NCU began planning for the activities required to achieve initial candidacy before the first learner was enrolled. The university's purpose is to offer an outstanding traditional education to those who might not otherwise be able to pursue their educational goals. However, in order for the learner to fully benefit from this experience, the university realized a need to pursue and acquire regional accreditation status.

A series of questions arose about how best to achieve this objective. It was obvious that we needed to have an outstanding board, staff, faculty mentors, and consultants who could help us achieve the desired results. Although NCU had fewer than one hundred learners when the self-study planning began, the needed funds to accomplish these objectives were allocated.

In 1997 the university adopted its first strategic plan, developing the vision and values of the institution as well as goals and objectives for the next five years. The university also developed its model for continuous improvement, and began forming its approach for institutional effectiveness and learner outcomes assessment. The institutional effectiveness and assessment plan was prepared, and the self-study was regarded as a snapshot of the university. Tools were put into place with the first courses to solicit feedback from learners on the courses and faculty mentors. General education objectives were defined, and the entire undergraduate curriculum was reviewed. The need for program review was recognized, and an approach was drafted.

Northcentral University actually conducted two self-studies and had two evaluation team visits in seeking initial candidacy: the first self-study was done in 1999 with a January 2000 visit, and the second self-study was done in 2000 with a January 2001 visit. Preparation for both included:

- Involving all constituents of NCU in the self-study process.
- Reviewing and revising all handbooks. These included the learner handbook, faculty handbook, staff handbook, dissertation handbook, and catalog.
- Reviewing and revising all policies and procedures, the institutional effectiveness and assessment plan, the strategic plan, and the information technology plan.
- Conducting our review, and writing and revising our responses to the GIRs and Criteria.

The January 2000 evaluation team determined that while NCU met the GIRs for the bachelor's and master's degree programs, it did not satisfy GIRs 10, 11, and 15 for the doctorate degree programs. The university withdrew its application for initial candidacy before the Commission Review Committee considered the evaluation team's recommendation, with the understanding that NCU would resubmit these problem GIRs for staff review and approval to reactivate the candidacy process. The unsuccessful site visit for initial candidacy in January 2000 taught us many lessons that we would incorporate for our January 2001 site visit for initial candidacy. We had a tremendous amount of work to accomplish:

- Conducting program reviews for both the business and technology management programs and the psychology programs.
- Reviewing and revising the dissertation process for the Ph.D. learners.
- Strengthening the faculty members, especially those supporting the doctorate programs.

The challenge was to continue our efforts in achieving initial candidacy, improving and managing university affairs, and attracting new learners while supporting our continuing learners. All constituents of NCU needed to be active participants for success.

Preparation for the Self-Study

Based on feedback we received from our board members, consultants, and the first site team, we had an idea of our strengths and challenges. Objective evaluations are vital to improve the university. We found ourselves clarifying and revising university documents because the staff and faculty mentors knew exactly how the university functioned and assumed that others understood that information as well.

Specifically, NCU conducted its next self-study and prepared for the site visit by:

- Appointing a self-study coordinator. An assistant coordinator is also helpful.
- Attending conferences, including The Higher Learning Commission's Annual Meeting, even for the more experienced people.
- Obtaining a number of Self-Study Reports from similar universities.
- Beginning the self-study process early.

- Establishing an appropriate and realistic timeline for the entire self-study.
- Involving everyone. Since we are a small institution, each constituent was informed of what his or her particular responsibilities would entail, and this was done as soon as possible.
- Developing the report, with at least three or four drafts of the self-study to review and revise.
- Searching for and obtaining a number of knowledgeable consultants who were not associated with the university. Clarifying areas that required objective feedback was important.
- Establishing a working relationship with our Commission staff liaison was also critical.
- Initiating appropriate changes to the university's policies, procedures, curriculum, etc. It was imperative that this was well-documented.
- Prioritizing institutional research and assessment. We realized very quickly that the university must make this a priority if we wanted to achieve our goals. Northcentral University created a continuous improvement model that invokes a constant cycle of "plan," "do," "assess," and "improve."
- Establishing a Resource Room. We had two Resource Rooms. One was on paper, while the other was electronic. We gave our evaluation team access to the electronic version two months before the site visit. The electronic Resource Room was helpful in the team's preparation.
- Ensuring that our Self-Study Report was an accurate evaluation of the institution. We honestly assessed our own strengths and challenges and incorporated realistic strategies for dealing with the challenges.
- Preparing the participants for the site visit. All constituents were informed that they might not have the answers to every question that was asked of them. However, they should know the person who could accurately answer the particular question and refer the team member to that person.
- Conducting a mock site visit using experienced consultants. This was helpful to everyone, especially those who had never gone through this process before.
- Getting to know our site team. We researched the backgrounds of our team members in order to better prepare and anticipate their questions. In addition, this research was also helpful in assessing which site team member could best answer questions for particular areas in the role of consultant during the site visit.
- Preparing our constituents to express what they believed about NCU. Most of these people were excited to discuss what they were doing and how the university made a difference.

Summary

The self-study is a challenging endeavor, to say the least. Our university staff could not have accomplished this alone. Networking with others outside the university is necessary for success. The more involvement from the community, outside consultants, board members, learners, faculty, staff, and other interested parties, the better the experience and the more likely the goals will be realized.

In preparation for the site visit for initial candidacy, Northcentral University reexamined its philosophy, principles, values, vision, mission, and goals. Intensive discussions took place, in which we reevaluated who we are and what we desire to achieve in the future. We challenged our assumptions and institutional paradigms. During this process, Northcentral University discovered the extent to which we fit traditional models of higher learning. We determined that in some areas our uniqueness addresses the needs of our adult learners.

Most important, we invoked critical inquiry upon ourselves, leaving no terms, concepts, or practices unchallenged. Our institution continues to grow. We no longer fit our old box. Northcentral University has evolved and matured as an institution; we are excited about our role and future in higher education.

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